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Squatters and the Right to the City:
Waiting for Eviction in Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Squatters and the Right to the City:
Waiting for Eviction in Buenos Aires, Argentina

by

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Dedication

For my parents—who have always given me a home

and

for Nina

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Squatters and the Right to the City:
Waiting for Eviction in Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Poor Latin American migrants arriving to Buenos Aires are usually able to find work and access urban resources, but struggle to secure stable housing inside the city. Faced with this dilemma, they often scramble to find somewhere to live among the city's informal housing options. Some move into *casas tomadas,* crowded, run-down boarding houses and informal hotels where multiple families live together. Inside, residents must constantly negotiate their presence and their access to shared spaces and amenities, all the while waiting to be evicted. In Argentina, the eviction process can take anywhere from a few months to a few years as the case makes its way through the courts. Despite the tenuous conditions, residents benefit from these spaces, which are often centrally located, close to jobs, schools and public transportation.

Using a multi-scale, ethnographic approach, this dissertation explores how residents of *casas tomadas* cope with housing instability and struggle to stay in the city amidst the threat of eviction. Focus is on residents' routine practices inside casas tomadas, their alliances with housing organizations, and their reliance on the city government housing subsidy. My findings show that structural and temporal conditions at these different scales limit and destabilize residents and advocates' struggle for housing and the right to the city. Building upon literature on the right to the city, critical urban studies and political ecology, this dissertation seeks to broaden and deepen our

understanding of the routine and everyday ways the poor experience urban instability and marginalization. In this research housing and home are understood as a primary resource from which people can access other important urban resources. As such, this dissertation argues that house and home are a fundamental and central element in any struggle for the right to the city.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

La población más humilde es la más atada a su hábitat
(It is the poor who are most bound to their habitat)
Meeting at the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) (2009)

Home's primary purpose is to perpetuate itself.
Katherine Platt (1996)

ARRIVING TO THE CITY

I asked my aunt Elena if I could come to Buenos Aires. Her sister, my aunt Natalia, was already traveling with Elena's two boys, whom she had taken care of since Elena had moved to Buenos Aires years ago. So I came with them. When we arrived to the hotel where Elena was renting a room, the manager saw that there were four of us and refused to let us stay there. We were desperate! Where were going to go? Where were we going to live? My aunt called her friend and we went to stay in her friend's room for the time being. She threw mattresses on the floor for the four of us and told us we could take showers, since she had a private bathroom. She lived in a *casa tomada*, but she didn't tell us that, she just told us it was a building where everyone had originally paid rent, but they had stopped because there were so many problems with the maintenance of the building. We had just arrived and we weren't about to start asking questions! At that moment all we wanted was to be able to eat something and to sleep.

Migrants often move to Buenos Aires because of economic hardship in their home country or place of origin, or because a network of friends and family already in Buenos Aires may have spoken about the economic opportunities available in the city. For many, Buenos Aires offers economic opportunities and a relatively higher quality of life than in

their places of origin, including access to health care, education and various social programs and economic support. However, renting an apartment in Buenos Aires is practically impossible without the proper economic or social capital, even with some source of stable income. Real estate and rent have steadily risen since 2001, making it increasingly difficult for even the middle and lower classes to rent or buy an apartment or house in Buenos Aires proper (Baer, 2008; Ciccolella and Baer, 2008). Prices, however, are not the primary obstacle that poor migrants and residents face when trying to find a place to live—they must also cut through red tape of private documents and multiple fees. As a rule, renters must furnish landlords with a *garantía*[1], paystubs, and additional costly up-front fees—to which the poor or even middle-income migrants do not usually or easily have access. These requirements and other programs, together with policies that have historically neglected the issue of affordable housing in the city, are some of the reasons why poor Argentines and immigrants are routinely excluded from the city's formal housing market (Oszlak, 1991; Pastrana et al., 1995).

Under these conditions, poor urban residents and migrants are often forced to live with relatives and friends, rent bedrooms in family hotels or multi-family homes, squat, or live in one of many *villas miserias* (land settlements). For those who look for housing

[1]The *garantía* consists of owning (or knowing someone who owns) property within the Province of Buenos Aires. Even individuals who own property in other areas of Argentina have difficulty renting an apartment inside the city. A *garantía* is used to guarantee that the individual renting an apartment or house will respect the contract by paying rent each month until the contract ends, which is usually after two years. If they do not, the owner can go to the person who has supplied the guarantee or property and hold them accountable for lack of payment. The use of a *garantía* is often justified by the argument that the legal process of eviction can last up to two or three years. By requiring a *garantía,* the owner can draw from the value of the property acting as the *garantía*. ,Without a *garantía* an individual or family cannot rent an apartment inside the city. In addition to these requirements, discriminatory attitudes and practices also exclude urban migrants and the poor from accessing any options inside the formal housing market.

outside the city, but continue to work inside, this can mean an expensive daily commute of over two or three hours or more on multiple modes of transportation. Thus, although there are a series of programs, policies and structures in place to facilitate poor migrants' legally residing, working, and accessing social benefits in Argentina, their exclusion from formal housing options in Buenos Aires directly shapes and restricts their access to the city and its resources.

Still, many others, like Sara, find housing in the city in squatter houses, or *casas tomadas,* as they are referred to in Argentina.[2] These are usually empty buildings, houses or apartments that have been taken over by individuals who then rent out or sell rooms to (often unsuspecting) families. The term *casas tomadas* also refers to informal family hotels and multi-family houses, where residents were living and paying rent—often for years—but for different reasons fell into eviction. This research focuses specifically on family hotels or boarding houses where residents were paying rent when they were abruptly notified that they would be evicted.

In Argentina, eviction processes can take from a few months to a few years until they are finally settled in the courts. This creates a complicated temporal and spatial context of waiting for eviction amidst crowded and deteriorating conditions where entire families live in one bedroom while negotiating access to shared bathrooms and kitchens with multiple residents. Unlike other informal housing options, like the *villas miserias*[3], c*asas tomadas* occupy a peculiar space in the city, in which residents are simultaneously

[3] For work on *Villas Miserias* see (Auyero, 1999, 2000; Alarcón 2012; Ursino, 2012).

spatially connected and socially marginalized. On the one hand, they are often centrally located, living close to their jobs, education, health care and other services and resources. On the other, they must live in run down, crowded and highly precarious and unstable conditions in which they have few, if any protections or security of tenure. As a result, the residents of *casas tomadas*—the majority being immigrants from Argentina's Northern Provinces and countries like Peru, Paraguay and Bolivia—know they will eventually be forced to move out and possibly leave the city altogether.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Focusing on poor migrants living in *casas tomadas* in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this research examines the importance of housing and home from the optic of the right to the city and the struggle for social and spatial justice (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2003; Soja, 2009; Marcuse, 2009). I explore how residents of *casas tomadas* give meaning to and use their dwelling to access urban resources, appropriate spaces, and achieve personal goals and economic gains. In this research, home is understood as a central space from which to explore how migrants and the poor employ place-making strategies to gain access to the city and urban resources.

This approach is not overly concerned with the more formal and macro perspectives of housing that are common in policy oriented or urban planning studies. Instead, I focus on the personal, political, symbolic and material meanings that housing and home have for urban residents and the social organizations that represent them. In this research, notions of housing and home are explored through an interdisciplinary and multi-scale approach. I examine the multiple and simultaneous meanings attributed to

house and home through an analysis of urban residents' actions, place-making strategies and livelihood practices to appropriate spaces and secure access to resources in the city.

This research originates from my interest in migrant and poor community's ability to make claims to the city and access urban resources that can contribute to livelihood stability and quality of life. Specifically, I ask, if home and housing tenure—understood as a basic resource—can offer spatial and temporal stability from which individuals, families and communities can access other resources, then how do families and communities cope when they are unable to secure some form of stable housing?

Underlying this research is the notion of the 'right to the city', which calls for a more inclusive and socially and spatially 'just' urban order (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2003; Soja, 2009). There is a very rich body of work on the right to the city that encompasses a broad series of concerns from urban governance and citizenship to social movements and theoretical explorations regarding the very meaning of rights (Isin, 2000; Purcell, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Mayer, 2009; Attoh, 2011). At the heart of much of this research is a reaction to the increasing effects of the neoliberal project on the global order (Purcell, 2002; Harvey, 2003) and the appeal for "the urgent political priority of constructing cities [and societies] that correspond to human social needs rather than to the capitalist imperative of profit-making" (Brenner et al., 2009; 2012). In this sense, for many, the right to the city is a moral claim, one that moves beyond the legal realm, and that promotes a new social order that incorporates the material needs and desires of a broader collective whole (Marcuse, 2009). In this research I draw specifically on two aspects of the concept of the right to the city as a framework for this research. The first is

Lefebvre's notion of lived space, understood here as a person's ability to *actively* engage in one's own spatial and social experience of everyday life (Purcell, 2002). The second refers to urban inhabitants' ability to use the city, in ways that refer both to their ability to benefit from it and to contribute to it (Marcuse, 2009). Using these definitions, I employ the concept of the right to the city to refer to people's ability to make a place for themselves in the city, from which they are able to benefit from access to urban resources and actively build a life for themselves and their families that is part of a broader set of social relations and structures.

In this sense, this research explores the practical and everyday ways that urban inhabitants and communities experience and access city spaces and urban resources. Through this approach, my objective is to highlight how those who are marginalized from any rights to the city struggle to secure a place for themselves and their families amidst great instability. I also draw on access theory to explore how access to and use of resources and urban spaces, when not based on rights, instead rely on dynamic structures and relationships of power (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Drawing on these two approaches my objective is to work within the tensions of the more normative conceptualizations of the right to the city, and the empirical reality of those urban dwellers who have few rights and who must struggle to live and remain in the city. In other words, paraphrasing Marcuse (2009), it is the right to the city of those who do not now have that right with which I am concerned (191).

Like Fenster (2005), who argues that a discussion around the right to the city must begin at the home-scale, I also employ an analysis of people's struggle to stay in the city

that begins at the home. However, unlike Fenster, who defines home as a private realm, I argue that the home is a primary and interconnected space from which people are able to access important urban resources and services (Coolen, 2006; Turner, 1968). In this approach, housing is understood primarily through its functionality; as a basic resource employed in multiple ways by different urban actors. Finally, I engage with literature from critical urban studies, which examines the multiple creative, spontaneous and contradictory ways that the poor and other urban actors not only negotiate their presence and their access to basic resources and services in urban spaces, but also constitute dynamic, innovative and interconnected spaces of action and production (Bayat, 1997; Simone, 2004; Auyero, 2012).

ACTORS AND EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

Through an analysis of daily livelihood practices, routine strategies and uneasy alliances of negotiation and subordination, this research focuses on the social and spatial relationships of Peruvian migrant residents of *casas tomadas*, the social housing organization *Coordinadora de Inquilinos de Buenos Aires*[4] (CIBA), and the City Government of Buenos Aires. I examine the spatial, temporal and social relationships inside *casas tomadas* and the way in which squatter households negotiate their "place" and access to shared resources even as they coexist with numerous other residents in small and precarious spaces as they await eviction. I also consider how these practices are representative of attempts to create a sense of home and maintain some semblance of stability and security even as residents move closer to the day of eviction.

[4] The Coordinator of Residents of Buenos Aires

A second focus of this research is residents' participation in social organizations' political struggle for housing and the right to the city. I explore the political character of *casas tomadas* and resident's struggle to stay in the city through their affiliation with the social organization CIBA. CIBA is one of many social organizations that advocate for the right to housing in Buenos Aires, and one of only two or three organizations in the city that continue to advocate primarily for residents living in *casas tomadas* inside Buenos Aires. The *casas tomadas* that I became familiar with for this project were all affiliated with CIBA. The organization offers legal representation to residents while also demanding political reform. My research focuses primarily on CIBA as a social and political organization that advocates for the rights of squatter households.

When residents of *casas tomadas* begin to work with CIBA, they are asked to participate in protests, marches and a series of other resistance strategies. CIBA's objective is to pressure city government officials to develop comprehensive housing policies that address the housing shortage inside Buenos Aires. An examination of the relationship between residents of *casas tomadas* and CIBA illustrates how routine strategies and struggles inside *casas tomadas* are intricately tied to and representative of resident's much broader struggle to secure access to urban resources and remain in the city.

The city government is the third actor included in this research, playing an important role in the eviction process in seemingly contradictory ways. Specifically, under the program, *Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle* (ASFC), the city provides occupants of *casas tomadas* a housing subsidy if they meet certain requirements. The

housing subsidy is a monthly stipend that families evicted from their homes are able to receive for a period of six to ten months. The first installment is given on the day of eviction. Later, families can continue to receive the subsidy for up to ten months. CIBA uses the subsidy to negotiate with the city; pressuring the government to give the entire amount in one installment, or threatening to resist eviction if the government does not agree to some or all of their demands. I demonstrate that the subsidy is an important factor in the strategies and decisions of residents of *casas tomadas* and for the organizations that represent them. Finally, I highlight what I perceived as negative impacts of the subsidy on the residents and in their relationship with CIBA as they wait to be evicted from their homes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are part of a broader concern for poor people's right to the city *on their own terms* and emphasize the dynamic nature of routine practices and strategies within a condition of real and perceived vulnerability and frustration. Furthermore, by employing the concept of resources to an analysis of poor people's right to the city, my objective is to focus on the way that poor communities routinely experience urban life on a daily basis.

1. What place-making practices and strategies do residents of *casas tomadas* develop in order to secure a space for themselves and their families inside *casas tomadas*?

This research answers this question through an exploration of the internal dynamic of these houses and processes. I examine the spatial and social relationships inside *casas tomadas*, how residents negotiate their place and their use of often shared

and tenuous resources. I explore how, by making a place for themselves inside the houses, residents of *casas tomadas* attempt to create and maintain some semblance of stability and security in their daily lives, even while negotiating social and spatial dynamics in crowded and dilapidated conditions.

2. How do residents of *casas tomadas* build and maintain alliances that potentially ensure them access to livelihood resources in the city?

This second research question attempts to address the way that squatter households develop alliances with social organizations and the workings of those alliances in order to remain in the city. This research responds to this second question through an exploration of the long term and often contentious relationship between residents of *casas tomadas* and the social organization, CIBA. I show that the relationship between residents and CIBA is representative of how strategies and struggles for resources that take place inside the houses extend beyond the home to the political struggle for the right to the city and social/spatial justice. The relationships between CIBA and residents are not stable alliances. Instead, they are characterized by a high degree of distrust and mutual dependence, experienced and perceived differently by the different actors throughout the many stages of the eviction process.

3. How do the socio-political and temporal-spatial conditions at the household, institutional and city level shape these strategies and/or livelihood practices of the different actors involved in this process?

This third question analyzes how institutional structures and the role of the city government shape strategies and practices. Specifically, I explore how the presence of

the city government, through its government sponsored housing subsidy, impacts residents' of *casas tomadas'* decision-making strategies during the eviction process. The role of the city is a particularly nuanced and seemingly contradictory one that strongly influences the strategies and practices of the residents of *casas tomadas* and CIBA in terms of the eviction process, during the day of eviction and often for several months afterwards. The institutional structures and the manner in which residents experience them at different stages of the eviction process are considered and explored in this third research question.

4. What are some of the different urban resources and practices (alluded to in the first three questions)? How do residents use and give meaning to these resources in their daily lives?

This final question, addressed throughout this research and at the different scales of analysis (i.e. squatter houses, CIBA, the City), attempts not only to illustrate the kinds of resources that are important in these different spaces, but to examine the multiple-meanings applied to housing and home in the struggle to stay in the city. Inside *casas tomadas*, basic objects like a kettle, a room with a private bathroom, or a balcony, may take on multiple meanings and uses. In the city, for some of the families, proximity to schools, clinics, jobs or community networks take on particular importance.

Through this research I seek to highlight the importance of housing and home in the struggle for the right to the city and social and spatial justice. In the rest of this chapter I continue to discuss the general theoretical framework in which this research is grounded, drawing specifically on critical studies of home, critical urban studies and

access theory. Furthermore, I continue to define the right to the city in the context of this research and address the specific contributions of my work to the fields of human geography and urban studies.

FRAMING HOME

Empirical research on experiences of home are often absent from much of the mainstream literature on housing and urban processes (King, 2009). This is partly due to the stigma that continues to surround micro-scale, ethnographic research on home. In many ways, Duncan and Lambert's (1988) comment, "There still appears to be a lingering sense that home… is trivial compared with the public worlds of business, politics or even public pleasures" (382) continues to hold true today (King, 2009). Moreover, many scholars, politicians and "think tanks" continue to prefer the more 'objective' macro-scale, quantitative and policy based studies on housing (Haraway, 1988; King, 2009). As a result, the dynamic, contradictory and multi-scale way that people experience home is often overlooked in the broader research on housing studies.

Feminist and critical scholars, however, have increasingly addressed the problematic of home (Massey, 1994; Blunt, 2005). These scholars have argued and demonstrated that home and its multiple meanings and uses are much more complex and multi-scalar than is often recognized (Saunders and Williams,1988; Mallett, 2004; Coolen, 2006; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; King, 2009). Among these approaches, feminist and critical scholarship has both challenged and explored the tension between dialectic definitions that position home as a unique, safe, private space and more holistic frameworks that imagine home as intimately interconnected and overlapping with other

spaces (Massey, 2005). My research works within these tensions as I explore meanings of home through fluid, dynamic and routine practices at multiple scales, and also underscore normative ideas of home as a unique location, from which residents can potentially engage in broader place-making practices by creating networks and communities and securing access to other resources.

In this sense, residents in stable dwellings have a degree of power not afforded to those living in tenuous circumstances. Those living in "stable" homes are allowed a degree of control over their lives that is experienced both inside their home and outside in the ways that residents can position themselves and how they are perceived. Residents without stable or secure dwellings, who often live in a marginal state of waiting and uncertainty, experience power, time and space differently (Wingate Lewinson et al., 2010; Harms, 2013). Nevertheless, Wingate Lewinson et al. (2010) suggest that even in precarious living arrangements people will engage in home-making attempts for themselves and their families (13). Citing Wright (1997) they claim, "As active agents it is clear that poor people, like all people attempt to reassert their place in society, to establish a "homeplace" in the midst of deprivation, humiliation, and degradation" (5).

HOME AS RESOURCE

Ribot and Peluso's, theory of access (2003) offers a framework from which to explore the strategies, relationships and livelihood practices with which residents engage to ensure access to housing and other urban resources amidst extreme vulnerability. Access theory is concerned with identifying and mapping the way that individuals and communities are able to "benefit from things−including material objects, persons,

institutions and symbols" (153-154). Instead of focusing on the concept of rights, the authors argue that practices and relationships of power are an important determining factor in who can (and who cannot) benefit from resources. They identify a range of powers in which people partake in order to secure their access to resources. Drawing on Foucault (1984) the authors frame their conceptualization of power relationships not as fixed, but rather dynamic and changing. In this research, access theory is useful in studying the dynamic and shifting relationships inside *casas tomadas.* I show how residents engage in constantly changing relationships and routine strategies to secure access to things and services they need. At the center of an analysis of these practices are uneven relationships of power and negotiation as residents look for ways to remain in their home and in the city.

A fixed home also provides a location from which to access other important goods and services (Turner, 1968). For many urban residents, proximity to the city center offers them more possibilities and opportunities in the form of social, spatial and material networks. As Turner (1968) states, "Overcrowding, discomfort, and even the usually avoidable filth of the slum may be a price the aspirant to better living standards is quite willing to pay for improved opportunities" (355). Abdoumaliq Simone also makes a similar argument in his work on housing and communities in Johannesburg, South Africa,

> Access to affordable good housing stock within the central city remains vital to many households, enabling them to access educational and social welfare services otherwise too costly if disposable income were to be largely eaten up by either higher rents… or by transportation costs… [t]hus families are willing to take their chances in a highly insecure environment (Simone, 2008:143).

Many of the residents of *casas tomadas* who I interviewed also said that they stay in the city because of the numerous resources and benefits available to them. Living outside the city center of Buenos Aires means traveling long distances, poorer access to resources and high transportation costs. The families I interviewed, who at some point had moved out of Buenos Aires in order to find a place to live and then moved back, said that transportation costs and distances made it impossible to live outside of the city limits, especially with small children. In Turner's (1968) discussion on the functionality of housing, he emphasizes the importance of location, explaining that for residents to "maximize their opportunities" they, "must live near the source of those jobs where subsistence goods and available housing are cheap and transport costs and times are negligible. Their priority for location in terms of proximity to central city areas is, therefore, very high indeed" (356).

Thus, home is a fundamental resource from which urban residents can gain and maintain access to other primary urban resources such as jobs, education, social and familial networks, transportation and socioeconomic stability. Imagined as a resource, research on home can provide further understanding of the multiple meanings and practices of home and the many ways that residents and communities are able to benefit from their dwellings.

In this study the struggle to stay in the city is understood as one's ability to determine how they use the city in ways that allow them to decide and contribute to their spatial and social mobility, stability and quality of life and to the city itself (Lefebvre, 1991; Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Fenster, 2005; Brenner et al, 2009). I suggest that without

the ability to access housing, or build some form of home inside the city−particularly for the poor who have limited capital−broader social and spatial mobility is severely restricted, thus challenging the poor's ability to access other primary urban resources necessary for their basic livelihood. In this sense, the right to the city begins at the "home". Opportunities to access and create home spaces potentially provide a sense of stability and security, which in turn can offer a reliable and consistent entrance to the city and its many resources.

CITIES AND THE POOR

Since the 1980s, cities around the world have experienced increased development through financial investment, economic and political transformation, gentrification and urban development of neighborhoods. Presented as economic development, these neoliberal practices have led to increased marginalization and expulsion of the lower classes from urban centers (Harvey, 2003; Maeckelbergh, 2012). They have also led to changing perspectives on the use of urban spaces and the role of government. The privatization of numerous services and resources has meant a redefinition of urban spaces in terms of their uses and particularly who and what these spaces are for (Sassen, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; Smith, 2002; Harvey, 2003). Specifically, the city is increasingly being imagined as a space reserved for those individuals and groups with the financial capital to participate in urban life as consumers of the city. We are able to see this in the patterns of displacement of the poor and even middle classes from urban centers like New York City and San Francisco (Newman and Wily, 2006)

Under this current global regime, poor and lower middle class communities are steadily limited in terms of social, spatial and economic mobility, even as they struggle to stay in the city, close to jobs, education and social networks (Davis, 2006; Maeckelbergh, 2012; Smith, 2012). The impact of these processes (i.e. forced mobility of certain groups, increasing control and/or privatization of public spaces) is transforming the urban landscape, social relations and dynamics (Mitchell, 2003; Harvey, 2003; Janoschka, et al. 2013). The most obvious outcome of these processes is that the poor are being pushed out of the city because they can no longer afford to live there. Although many scholars have studied these processes, less has been written about how marginalized communities and households routinely experience and challenge the impact of these trends on their lives and livelihoods (Maeckelbergh, 2013). In most cases these are the populations who risk losing the most—their access to the city, as well as their jobs, quality of life, proximity to transportation, family services and programs, community networks and security.

Ironically, in the so-called "Global South," the broad effects of neoliberal processes, privatization and free trade have also led to mass migration to urban centers by the poor and lower class populations in search of work and opportunities (Davis, 2006). In many cities in the "developing world", slum dwellers now represent over 50% of the urban population (Davis, 2006). This mass migration to urban areas has put pressure on urban infrastructure regimes, even as financial speculation makes cities increasingly more expensive and exclusive. These urban migrants live, work and exist inside city centers, but usually with few services, unstable job opportunities, few protections or the ability to

find stable housing (Davis, 2006). Thus, as cities are becoming increasingly important for poor people's livelihood possibilities and their survival, their ability to access and appropriate urban resources, spaces and rights become progressively limited. Some of the world's poorest communities now live alongside some of the richest. However their relationship with the city is quite different compared to their rich neighbors. Instead,.the poor are increasingly at risk of being evicted from their homes and communities, unable to participate in urban life as imagined and constructed in the context of neoliberal and free-market structures.

Yet to imagine the urban poor exclusively in this way is to disregard how cities are agglomerations of multiple, fragmented spaces, relationships, experiences and interactions filled with different practices, lives, experiences and ways of living and being. The effects of urban investment on poor communities cannot simply be seen as the unfortunate byproduct of a neoliberal system. Marginalized communities and their experiences are also at the center of these processes and should be recognized as such (Davis, 2006). These deeply connected and parallel processes of global investment from above and mass migration from below, highlight the way that cities are intensely contentious spaces in which multiple interest groups, institutions, communities and individuals, and the movements that represent them, struggle to ensure a space in the city for themselves. Despite the hardships that the poor and lower classes endure, these communities are continually working to create opportunities, access resources and carve out spaces in order to build some form of sustainable livelihood for themselves and their families (Simone, 2008).

BUENOS AIRES: "PARIS OF LATIN AMERICA"

Although representative of urban processes across the globe, this research takes specific issue with conditions and experiences of urban migrant residents in Buenos Aires. Known as the "Paris of Latin America," Buenos Aires has always been celebrated, particularly by the Latin America elite, as a European city in terms of its architecture, population—white and largely of European descent— culture and lifestyle. Today, despite economic difficulties, Buenos Aires is a top tourist destination and continues to be characterized as a lively and energetic city, promoting culture, good food and a European experience with Latin American hospitality and flair.[5] Buenos Aires' streets are lined with coffee shops and bistros that fill up various times of the day with neighborhood residents, local travelers and the more than occasional international tourist. A fast-paced and bustling city, it has a vitality often ascribed to such cities as New York, London or Barcelona. *Los Porteños*, as the people living in Buenos Aires are called, are generally friendly, spontaneous and animated, and the city itself is an eclectic mix of Argentines of different social classes, second, third or fourth generation immigrants mainly from Europe and the Middle East, and newer immigrant communities from Asia, Senegal and throughout Latin America.

Since the 1990s, Argentina and Buenos Aires have been important destinations for Latin American immigrants, especially from countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay and

[5] A New York Times article (January 31, 2010) began with the following paragraph, "Contemporary Argentine history is a roller coaster of financial booms and cracks, set to gripping political soap operas. But through all the highs and lows, one thing has remained constant: Buenos Aires's graceful elegance and cosmopolitan cool. This attractive city continues to draw food lovers, design buffs and party people with its riotous night-life, fashion-forward styling and a favorable exchange rate. Even with the uncertain economy, the creative energy and enterprising spirit of *Porteños*, as residents are called, prevail — just look to the growing ranks of art spaces, boutiques, restaurants and hotels."

Peru. Of these three groups, immigration from Peru has increased quite remarkably, with the population of Peruvian migrants in Argentina rising from 16,000 to 158,000 between 1991 and 2010 (OIM Peru, 2012). Peruvian immigration to Argentina is largely urban with over 70% of the population moving to the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires and 40% moving directly to the city center (Cerrutti, 2009; OIM Peru, 2012). Women represent the majority of the Peruvian immigrant community, making up between 55-60% of the Peruvian population in Argentina (Cerrutti, 2009; OIM Peru, 2012).

Peruvians started to leave their country in the beginning of the nineties as a result of the political and economic strife under the authoritarian president Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) and growing violent conflict between his government and the armed rebel group, *Sendero Luminoso* (The Shining Path). The pegging of the Argentine peso to the US dollar during this period allowed immigrants from Peru and throughout Latin America to earn in dollars, which they could then send back to their families in their countries of origin. Although Argentina's financial crisis in 2001 ended the peso-dollar model and plunged the country into a deep depression with high unemployment and political and economic unrest, Peruvian migrants have remained in Buenos Aires and migration from Peru to Argentina continues at an annual rate of 6.6% (OIM Peru, 2012). The Peruvian migrant community is culturally vibrant and increasingly making their mark on the city. Unlike Bolivians and Paraguayan immigrant communities who live on the border areas of the city, Peruvians moved to the city center in the neighborhood of Abasto beginning in the 1990s. Although they are now migrating to other areas outside the city center, the Peruvian migrant community continues to be a visible presence inside

the city, and particularly in and around neighborhoods of the city center. Peruvian restaurants dot the landscape, with pictures of Macchu Picchu, red and white flags and Inca Cola in their windows. On the weekends, bars and discos in and around Abasto are full of Peruvians drinking and dancing. In many ways Peruvians have become a permanent and important presence in Buenos Aires.

Peruvian immigrants also continue to experience racism and discrimination. Despite high levels of education, Peruvian women usually work as domestic servants in the houses of wealthy families. Peruvian men work in construction and as day-laborers and are often unemployed and financially dependent on their wives and partners. Housing therefore is just one more aspect that characterizes the Peruvian immigrant experience in Buenos Aires. In other words, as I show throughout this dissertation, Peruvian residents in many ways have been able to develop ethnically-based communities and reproduce cultural spaces and identities. These communities and cultural practices are simultaneously embraced and marginalized inside the city and reflect what Peruvian migrants experience daily at the micro-level.

Current immigration policies and amnesty programs, such as *Patria Grande* and more recently *Mercosur* have made acquiring residency and living and working with authorization in Argentina a relatively easy and inexpensive process that is available to most Latin American immigrants.[6] Through these programs, immigrants must present a series of documents plus a fee of $300 pesos ($55 USD) in order to receive permanent

[6] Amnesty and residency programs like "Patria Grande" and "Mercosur" mean that immigrants from around Latin America can become legal residents of Argentina with relative ease. As residents, immigrants are eligible to access social programs and general benefits.

residency in Argentina. Although in practice the process is more complicated, mainly due to the bureaucracy that immigrants are forced to confront, these programs offer a very different approach than what is commonly experienced in so-called "developed countries." At the same time, the immigration policies at the federal level contrast with city housing policies that offer few, if any, protections to poor urban residents. Instead, although immigrants are able to legally work and reside in Argentina, their ability to live inside Buenos Aires' city-limits is constantly being challenged (Guano, 2004; Grimson, 2005; Cerrutti, 2005; Canevaro, 2007).

THE SEGREGATED CITY

Buenos Aires is a highly segregated city, one in which a considerable part of the city lives in poverty and insecurity. The city is socially and spatially organized by invisible and not so invisible borders that are quite effective in dividing and controlling the mobility of communities of different socio-economic status throughout the city (Grimson, 2008). Particularly palpable is the separation between the North with its tree-lined boulevards, luxury apartments and parks, and the Southern and Central neighborhoods where some of the poorest and most disenfranchised communities reside—usually in run-down cramped quarters in one of the multiple forms of informal housing they are able to access.

This eclectic universe of informal housing is made up of squatter houses, hotels, boarding houses, tenements, slums and informal settlements, all of which are scattered throughout the city. These multiple and distinct forms of informal housing inside Buenos Aires represent the marginalization and exclusion of at least 10% of the city's population

(Rodríguez, et al., 2007, UIMyE, 2009). Of these numbers, squatter houses, boarding houses, hotels and tenements alone constitute around 5.5% of housing in Buenos Aires and make up 25% in the Southern and Central sectors of the city. Other estimates from 2007 show that approximately 150,000 people lived in the forty-seven slum neighborhoods inside the city (Cohre, 2007 in Verón, 2011), 56,000 people lived in boarding houses, and another roughly 38,000 lived in hotels (Gazzoli, 2007 in Verón, 2011). In addition, 150,000 people are estimated to live in *casas tomadas* (MOI, Rodríguez et al. 2007 in Verón, 2011).

Despite these calculations, there is no accurate record of the total population living in informal housing inside the city. The estimates most cited by organizations and institutions working on issues of housing and informality in Buenos Aires continues to be between 500,000 and 600,000 residents (IVC, 2009), or roughly 15% of the city's population. In addition to the large numbers of people living in informal housing, evictions from these spaces have increased since 2001. From 2004 to 2006, the Center for Housing Rights and Eviction (COHRE) in Argentina cited an increase in evictions from 1818 to 4833, respectively (Veron, 2011). Part of what many have called an explicit campaign to push the poor out of the city, the people living in informal dwellings are not simply excluded and marginalized from the formal sector, but they are also deeply aware they may be pushed out of the city at any time.

DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

The following dissertation further addresses the themes and concepts discussed in this Chapter through an empirical, ethnographic exploration of migrant residents of *casas*

tomadas' experiences of home, their struggle to access and benefit from urban resources and to make a life for themselves in the city. **Chapter Two** discusses the methodological framework employed for this study. Based primarily on ten months of field research in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this study is an ethnographic account, grounded in qualitative methods and research. **Chapter Three** is a general historical account of housing policies in Buenos Aires throughout the 20th century until the present. Broad in scope, I focus on the fluctuating nature of housing policies during the first part of the 20th century and the dramatic changes after 1975. Drawing on texts by prominent Argentine scholars, I describe an oftentimes radically changing political landscape in which the poor are consistently exploited and marginalized. In **Chapter Four,** I introduce the main actors included in this research. I highlight the seemingly contradictory and dialectic relationship of mutual dependence and mistrust between residents of *casas tomadas* and CIBA, and their interface with the State. I do this through an ethnographic discussion of the relationship dynamics between CIBA and residents of *casas tomadas.* I also introduce and discuss the government sponsored housing subsidy, focusing on the different objectives, meanings and strategies surrounding the subsidy, understood as a strategy or tactic used by residents and CIBA in the context of the eviction process. **Chapter Five** explores the gendered experience of migration and the struggle to stay in the city through a focus on the way that Peruvian migrant women experience and confront their struggle for housing as migrant women in Buenos Aires. In this chapter I demonstrate how the role of gender and identity shape Peruvian women's decisions to migrate and later their struggle to create a "home" when they bring their family from

Peru or start a family in Argentina. **Chapter Six** focuses specifically on the livelihood practices and social and spatial strategies that women develop inside *casas tomadas* in order to negotiate their and their family's presence, secure access to shared resources, and create some semblance of social and spatial stability for themselves and their families. **Chapter Seven** explores how different actors and stakeholders make claims on different spaces and objects inside *casas tomadas* for their own financial interests and gains. The uncertain and ambivalent character of squatter houses means that these spaces and everything in them can and are employed in multiple, creative and particular ways. **Chapter Eight** analyzes the different phases of the eviction process, from the moment when residents find out that they are going to be evicted to the day of eviction. "Time" and "waiting" for eviction are two destabilizing factors that impact the relationships between the residents and in their dealings with CIBA. I show how residents' strategies and their relationships with each other and CIBA are tightly bound to the different stages of the eviction process and residents' changing hopes and expectations. I explore the changing dynamic in the relationships between the residents and also with CIBA as the date of eviction draws near. Finally, **Chapter 9** finishes the ethnography with a detailed discussion of the empirical and theoretical conclusions of this research.

CHAPTER II

Research Design and Methods

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY POPULATION AND RESEARCH SITE

In this Chapter I discuss the methodological framework, motivation and trajectory behind this research. I employed qualitative, ethnographic methods during ten months of field research. I both lived and conducted my research in Abasto, a working class neighborhood in the heart of the Buenos Aires. I specifically used participant observation, interviews and survey methods as the principal tools of data collection. In the following pages, I discuss how I arrived at this research, and the relationships I developed first with CIBA and then with residents of *casas tomadas.* Later, I offer a brief description of Abasto, the neighborhood where my research took place. Finally, I explain in further detail the methodological framework underlying this research. I conclude with a note on positionality.

I became interested in the topic of *casas tomadas* when I went to Argentina to conduct preliminary dissertation research in 2007. Drawing on my prior research that had focused on racialized narratives of discrimination against Peruvian immigrants in Santiago, Chile, I wanted to explore Peruvian migrant experiences in other destinations. I had lived in Santiago during the nineties, when narratives of neoliberalism celebrated and promoted an exclusionary type of development and modernization. In general these were racialized and class-based discourses in which development and modernization were tied to imaginations of a white (European) middle and upper class. The lower classes,

indigenous and non-white immigrant communities were not included in this narrative and were often seen as an impediment to these processes.

Although very different, Santiago and Buenos Aires are similar in important ways, and therefore offered a point of comparison from which to begin developing the scope of my dissertation research. Like Chile, Argentina in the 1990s had adopted a similar narrative in which immigrants from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru were portrayed as the ethnic underclass of the neoliberal development project. As Grimson (2005) explains, "The government celebrated this as a sign that Argentina had entered the 'First World'. Germany had its Turks, the United States its Mexicans and Argentina its Bolivians" (25). However, increasing economic hardships and growing disparity between the very rich and the rest of the country plagued Argentina's neoliberal model. This led to increasing xenophobia, bolstered by the government's use of poor immigrants from neighboring countries as a scapegoat to deflect the growing frustration and anger of the Argentine people (Grimson, 2005).

In both of these cases, the perceptions and identity of immigrants from neighboring countries remained in clear contrast to the nationalist narratives that celebrated and promoted modernization, development and first-world status. In Argentina however, after the financial and political crisis in 2001, policies and attitudes towards immigrants changed significantly (Grimson, 2005). No longer were immigrants blamed for the country's economic woes, many instead marching alongside Argentine

protesters during the first few months of the *corralito*[7]. Later, in 2006 the amnesty program *Patria Grande* was established, allowing immigrants from Latin American countries affiliated with *Mercosur*—the regional economic integration project— the opportunity to regulate their status in the country.

Initially I was interested in understanding how these economic, political and attitudinal changes in Argentina translated into Peruvians' routine experiences, opportunities and their visibility and uses of the city. Through preliminary interviews and informal conversations, I found that although many challenges remained, Peruvian immigrants and other migrant communities were increasingly appropriating spaces and using the city in multiple and diverse ways, in the form of micro-businesses, community organizations and cultural events. Furthermore, amnesty programs like *Patria Grande* had made it very easy and relatively cheap for Latin-American immigrants to remain in the country legally and without fear of deportation. Finally, even without resident status, immigrants were able to enjoy many of the resources and social services the government provides to all Argentine citizens (Cerrutti, 2009).

Despite important opportunities and access to a variety of services and resources, many still struggle to live in Buenos Aires. In order to remain in the city, the poor live in slum neighborhoods or informal hotel and boarding houses throughout the city. Entire families live in cramped, run-down rooms and share spaces and amenities with multiple inhabitants. Unlike the support and services other government policies and programs

[7] The *corralito* was the informal name for the economic measures taken at the end of 2001 and which were in force for one year. The *corralito* almost completely froze bank accounts and forbade withdrawals from U.S. dollar-denominated accounts. Its effects and the overall effects of the crisis on the population were extreme and led to a bartering system among many of the middle and lower-middle communities.

provide, these residents have little to no protections as tenants and no tenure security whatsoever.

I had worked with undocumented families in the United States, for whom the most destabilizing factor in their daily lives was the fear of deportation and financial concerns like the high cost of health care, rent and job insecurity. Thus I found it paradoxical that although poor migrants in Buenos Aires are increasingly appropriating spaces inside the city, they are unable to obtain stable, formal housing. Instead, even as they secure jobs, education, health care, organizational aid and support, many poor residents of Buenos Aires live in constant anticipation of being evicted from their homes and being pushed out of the city. I wanted to examine and understand how immigrants coped with this type of uncertainty in the crowded and rundown conditions of *casas tomadas*, even as they continued to appropriate spaces and access urban resources inside Buenos Aires.

This research focuses on the Peruvian immigrant community with an emphasis on Peruvian women's experiences and strategies living in *casas tomadas*. I chose to focus on this particular demographic not only because of my original interest in the Peruvian immigrant community, but also because they represent the majority of residents in the *casas tomadas* with which I worked.[8] Moreover, migrant women and their children are the public and private face of the struggle for housing and the right to remain in Buenos

[8] Peruvians are often stereotypically tied to *casas tomadas*, perhaps in part because of immigration patterns since the nineties. Unlike other immigrant groups, Peruvian migrants have moved to the city center and principally to the neighborhood of Abasto. Although this has changed over time and destinations for Peruvian migrants have diversified throughout the city, these stereotypes remain. It should be noted that there is no accurate census data regarding the population of *casas tomadas*.

Aires. I highlight how women assume the burden of taking care of their families, finding other places to live and negotiating access and uses to different spaces inside the houses. My focus on the Peruvian community as a distinctive group or migrant experience is not exhaustive, nor does it analyze many of the specific differences and distinctions between Peruvians and other migrant groups sharing these spaces. Instead, throughout this research, and particularly in Chapter Five I discuss some of the factors that characterize a gendered experience of immigration from Peru to Buenos Aires and the struggle to create a sense of home for themselves and their families.

ACCESSING CASAS TOMADAS

I was cognizant that if I was going to research the internal realities and processes of *casas tomadas,* I would need to find a way to legitimize my presence and interest in this population. In order to gain entry into the lives of residents and their communities in *casas tomadas,* I worked with the *Coordinadora de Inquilinos de Buenos Aires* (CIBA), a social organization that defends the legal and social rights of residents living in *casas tomadas* who are awaiting eviction. Without this connection, I would not have had the opportunity to become familiar with so many houses or establish close relationships with so many residents of different *casas tomadas.* My affiliation with CIBA had benefits and drawbacks, particularly in relation to how I was received and perceived by the residents of *casas tomadas.* Not all residents of *casas tomadas* were interested in working with CIBA. In fact, many were often very resentful and suspicious of their motives. This meant that as I became increasingly identified with CIBA, some residents were also leery of me and associated my presence and research to be that of CIBA How exactly this

influenced my relationships with residents in terms of the outcome of my research is unclear. However, I have incorporated this experience into the framework of my research, with a close look at the relationships and routine interactions and practices that existed between CIBA and the residents of *casas tomadas*. Moreover, it should be noted that although I make the distinction between what I refer to here as the executive members and resident-members of CIBA, in some ways the difference between these two "groups" is an ambiguous one. Almost all of the executive members were also current or prior residents of *casas tomadas* at the time of my research. This meant that although there was a certain hierarchy that existed inside the organization, power dynamics, identities and roles were fluid and often changed depending on the spatial and social context and events occurring at a specific time.

STORIES OF HOUSES AND PEOPLE

I was able to gain access to seven *casas tomadas* during my field research in 2009, but only five have been included in this research. Residents' accounts of their experiences in an additional house have also been incorporated even though they had been evicted long before I started my field research. The houses and hotels included in this study were in questionable condition before they entered the eviction process. In some of the houses the physical conditions of the building and bedrooms were truly appalling; broken toilets and sinks, leaky roofs, mold and loose wires are only some examples of the rundown character of these spaces. Even those with a legitimate owner were not in the required conditions to be officially recognized as a hotel or boarding house. Still, residents had stayed in these buildings paying rent month after month. When

they had learned they were going to be evicted, residents approached CIBA, hoping that the organization would be able to help them stay in their home.

Each house had its own story, and residents had their own experiences and perspectives of what it was like to live inside and wait for eviction. I became familiar with some of the houses more than others. In some I was able to interview many residents and witness various moments and events. Others, I would only visit on one or two occasions. I was also closer to residents from certain houses, which meant that sometimes I knew more about a certain house dynamic, but only from one perspective. In others I knew many people and therefore had a better sense of the general context from multiple perspectives. Regardless, it was also very clear that unless I lived in one of the houses, it was difficult to truly comprehend the reality of daily and long-term living in a *casa tomada.*

In this research, I develop an ethnography of the houses in order to explore and highlight multiple aspects of life in a *casa tomada.* Although I focus on particular houses more than others, my objective is to explore the universe of *casas tomadas* through an analysis of the different houses, residents' experiences, relationships and the social, spatial and temporal conditions under which they live. Although less explicit now, earlier drafts of this research often discussed the houses and residents almost interchangeably. This is due to the fact that each of the *casas tomadas* affiliated with CIBA *embodied* a specific entity or character, representative of a particular history and spatial reality. Each of the houses had names, usually in reference to the streets where they were located. Residents and members of CIBA referred to the houses by their

names as if they were people. Sometimes the names of the houses were used to distinguish residents with the same name, but who lived in different houses. The eviction of a group of residents from *Gardel, Tucuman*, or *Zelaya* also meant the breakdown of a whole community, a whole world from which residents were dispersed, often to fend for themselves in another informal space. Despite the liminal and precarious nature of these communities, they were also the places where residents had created the necessary conditions and relationships to access other urban resources and to create a sense of home. Without these communities, residents were often forced to start over without the protections and support they had built over time in these spaces. When I asked the director of CIBA about the house where CIBA was located, he responded with certain nostalgia; "What is the history of this house? It is the history of some of us…" (*Qué es la historia de esta casa? Es la historia de algunos de nosotros"*).[9]

ABASTO NEIGHBORHOOD

All of the *casas tomadas* included in this research were affiliated with CIBA and located in and around the neighborhood of Abasto, a historically working class, immigrant neighborhood that is home to a large Peruvian immigrant community and that has also experienced urban renewal in the past fifteen years. In the eighties and early nineties, Abasto was considered a rundown neighborhood with high unemployment and many abandoned buildings and houses due to the closing of the city's original central market in 1984. As a result, it was also a neighborhood to which many of the displaced

[9] Interview with Jorge Abasto, 11/24/2009. It is interesting to note that in Spanish the word for history and story can be used interchangeably in contexts like the one above.

poor returned after the military dictatorship, finding refuge in old abandoned houses. In the late nineties however, Abasto became one of many neighborhoods throughout Buenos Aires in which international developers began to invest (Carman, 2006). The renovation of the old Central Market (*El Abasto*) into an exclusive shopping mall, packaged together with the construction of a large supermarket, an apartment complex, and later, the construction of the five star Hyatt Plaza Hotel, was supposed to mark the beginning of Abasto's transformation from a so-called dangerous, run-down and forgotten area of the city to a "modern", middle class neighborhood and tourist attraction, recalling a distant and whitewashed immigrant, working class and bohemian past for international tourists and tango aficionados. The gentrification of the neighborhood has not been linear however (Carman, 2006). Instead, Abasto has become an eclectic and colorful neighborhood, in which new, upscale apartment buildings, hotels, and museums stand next to abandoned buildings, Peruvian restaurants, neighborhood bars, a Jewish orthodox community, while African and Peruvian immigrant men and women who stand on the street selling food and watches.

Old, run-down family hotels and squatter homes characterize this landscape as well, with some of the houses I worked in being less than a block away from the Abasto Shopping Mall, the Plaza Hotel, brand named showrooms like Adidas, and upscale cafes. The eclectic nature of Abasto has made it an interesting but contentious place where multiple local and neighborhood organizations promote its working class character and immigrant past and present, and international and national developers pursue a more neoliberal and profitable version of the city (Carman, 2006). The location of squatter

houses and their close proximity to regulated and exclusive spaces, directly challenge neoliberal notions and imaginations of what Buenos Aires has the potential to be by those in power, and local and international organizations that represent a distinct discourse regarding who has a right to the city.

Contextualizing my research in these multiple spaces and employing a multi-methods ethnographic approach, I focus on the strategies, livelihood practices and relationships that residents employ in order to control and offset chronic temporal and spatial uncertainty. Using a methodological framework grounded in participant observation and informal and semi-structured interviews, my objectives were to explore how temporal and spatial uncertainty is experienced and lived by the urban poor. Through this research one of my overarching objectives was to highlight the complex and nuanced nature of urban poverty and instability through an analysis of its daily and routine manifestations starting at the scale of the home. I also wanted to place further emphasis on the fundamental role of "home space" in the struggle for spatial justice and the right to the city. The home continues to be understudied, despite its fundamental sociospatial importance as an emotional and practical "center" from which individuals and families can construct their lives and access basic resources. In effort to contribute to the literature on home this research examines experiences, meanings, uses and routines practices of home through the following questions: 1. What place-making practices and strategies do residents of *casas tomadas* develop in order to secure a space for themselves and their families inside *casas tomadas*?; 2. How do residents of *casas tomadas* build and maintain alliances that potentially ensure them access to livelihood resources in the city?;

3. How do the socio-political and temporal-spatial conditions at the household, institutional and city level shape these strategies and/or livelihood practices of the different actors involved in this process?; 4. What are some of the different urban resources and practices (alluded to in the first three questions)? How do residents use and give meaning to these resources in their daily lives?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Because this study sought to understand the complex, nuanced and routine practices and relationships of various actors at different scales, it required a multi-method, ethnographic research design. Methods such as informal and semi-structured interviews and participant observation allowed me to explore the experiences and strategies of residents of *casas tomadas* as they struggle to secure access to resources inside *casas tomadas* and to remain in the city partly through their alliance with CIBA.

I conducted informal and semi-structured interviews with CIBA's executive members, Peruvian migrant women living in *casas tomadas* affiliated with CIBA, leaders of the Peruvian migrant women's organization *Mujeres Peruanas Unidas Migrantes y Refugiados* (MPUMR), mid- and high-level officials from the *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social* responsible for the *Programa de Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle* (AFSC) and the disbursement of its funds. I employed participant observation in my dealings with CIBA, documenting weekly meetings with resident-members, executive board meetings, special events at CIBA, protests, marches, meetings at the houses, and other moments and events. I also administered short surveys in some of the houses in order to further generalize some of the experiences of waiting for eviction discussed in

detail during interviews. These strategies allowed me to access residents' and CIBA executive members' situated practices and knowledges, and provided an intimate view of the complex, multiscale spatial and temporal relationships of the different actors. The remainder of this chapter details my use of these methods. I first describe my incorporation of institutional ethnography as the overarching ethnographic approach in this work. Then, I build on my discussion of Ribot and Peluso's Access Theory from Chapter One as a useful methodological framework. Finally, I discuss in detail how and in what situations I incorporated participant observation and informal and semi-structured interviews as the primary forms of data collection.

Institutional Ethnography

Institutional ethnography is a methodological and theoretical framework developed by the sociologist and feminist, Dorothy Smith (1989). Unhappy with the uneven and often imposed interpretations by "professionals" of so-called "objects of study," Smith's approach positions the everyday world as the problematic and individuals as "subjects of knowledge." As such, institutional ethnography's focus of analysis is on everyday "activities or doings in the actual local situations and conditions of our lives" (Smith, 1989: 409). Institutional ethnographies' methodological framework highlights three important "tasks," that are easily applied to the focus of my own research. These "tasks" employ certain social realms as a way to categorize the "data" collected from experiential-based research. Briefly, these are ideology, activities and social relationships. Specifically this refers to the ideology behind organizational practices, the activities that people engage in as a form of social production and reproduction, and the

social relationships that link multiple sites of human activity (Grahame, 1998; Katz, 2010). These mutually inclusive "tasks" offer a contextual framework from which to further explore a particular problematic or context through people's everyday activities and experiences.

This approach to the everyday activities, relationships and social structures is also useful in highlighting how ideology structures and gives meaning to routine activities and relationships. Women's gendered experiences in the context of their homes are one example. As I discuss in this research, women living in *casas tomadas* struggle to create a sense of home for themselves and their families.

Through a focus on the everyday experiences of residents of *casas tomadas* my objective was to capture and explore how people confront the problematic of eviction, informal housing and their struggle to stay in the city. As I discuss throughout this research, resident's relationships with CIBA and with the City government (through the housing subsidy) embody institutional and relational structures that contribute to residents' experience, their understanding of their situation, and the strategies in which they engage in order to maneuver and control spatial and temporal constrictions on their lives.

I expand this methodological framework to include Ribot and Peluso's (2003) methods underlying their access theory approach. This approach is closely aligned with an institutional ethnographical perspective through its focus on the everyday practices and structures that define how people and communities are able to access resources at different scales. Similarly, access theory is concerned with identifying and mapping the

dynamic processes through which different actors experience and participate in relationships of power and control that impact their ability to access important resources. Thus, I employ Ribot and Peluso's access approach as a way to further conceptualize the activities of residents of *casas tomadas* through practices of place and home-making in the form of securing access to daily urban spaces and resources. The following section is a discussion about the specific contexts in which I applied these methodological approaches in the form of participant observation and informal and semi-structured interviews.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a methodology in which a researcher collects data by participating in the routine practices, rituals, interactions and activities of the people they are studying. Through this methodological approach, the researcher is able to learn about both the explicit and less obvious aspects of the culture and community in question. "[It] is a way to collect data in a relatively unstructured manner in naturalistic settings….by [observing and taking] part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied" (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010: 259-260). This methodology is useful for capturing a whole series of less explicit details and data, which would normally be ignored or missed in more structured and focused approaches. This research employed participant observation and surveys, in addition to the more individual data collected during informal and semi-structured interviews. The following is an account of the ways and contexts in which this methodology was employed in this research.

As I have already mentioned, much of this research was possible through my affiliation with CIBA. I was able to witness various moments and aspects of residents' experience living in a *casa tomada*, awaiting eviction, and their struggle to remain in the city. I began my research by attending the weekly *asambleas* (meetings) every Wednesday evening. I would sit with the other resident-members in the large room to listen to the executive members discuss current events and perhaps receive news about the legal state of affairs regarding their house. I would often arrive early to chat with some of the members or help Susana—one of the resident and executive members—prepare empanadas and juice that she would sell to the residents who had come for the meeting. During occasional weekend events in which CIBA sold food to residents in order to make extra money to pay expenses, I would work in the kitchen with other volunteers. I also attended other weekly executive meetings and less frequent group or house meetings whenever possible. This allowed me to become very involved with CIBA through its various daily and routine operations and allowed me further contact with residents inside *casas tomadas.*

I regularly accompanied Rocio, a petite Peruvian woman who lived in the building that housed CIBA's headquarters, to each of the *casas tomadas* to collect CIBA's monthly quota. I was able to explore the houses, meet many of the residents who did not always go to weekly meetings and also witness the different interactions between CIBA representatives and residents. Not all residents of *casas tomadas* were happy with CIBA's presence in their lives and therefore attitudes and interactions with

representatives of the organization were often contentious or just awkward and uncomfortable.

The visits to collect quotas were often paradoxical moments, in which Rocio, who had also experienced living in a *casa tomada* and eviction, tried to reinforce CIBA's authority over the house, as she asked that they pay what they owe to the organization. She never threatened or demanded money and some residents never paid. In general, CIBA was always struggling to pay their bills. However, these visits allowed me to witness the complexities and contradictions of power struggles and relationships at the micro-scale between residents of *casas tomadas* and the organization. It also allowed a look into the "homes" of all of the residents. I was able to witness the different ways residents tried to control these spaces and maintain some degree of privacy. Usually I remained quiet and would hold a flashlight to help Rocio write receipts and document in her little notebook who had paid, who still owed, and who was up to date on their payments. This experience allowed me glimpses into people's lives, their relationships and the general dynamic of the houses that I would not have witnessed otherwise.

Through my affiliation with CIBA, I also participated in protests, meetings that took place in each of the *casas tomadas,* and more formal meetings with government officials and other organizations as well as protests, *escraches*[10]*,* and blockades. During the final months of my field research I was also able to participate in an organized resistance to eviction in one of the houses. I also witnessed when CIBA broke into one of

[10] An *escrache* is a type of personalized protest against an individual or group of individuals.

the *casas tomadas* in order to place some of their members in the empty rooms of the hotel.

In many ways I believe that I was allowed almost full access into CIBA's organizational practices and was able to participate and observe multiple events and circumstances. In other ways, I always wondered if and why I was intentionally or unintentionally excluded from some events and was very aware of my confusion about details and situations. This was largely due to language or cultural clues I had difficulty understanding. For example it took me months of repeatedly asking the same questions in order to fully understand the legal and socio-political framework surrounding the housing crisis and eviction in Buenos Aires. That said, I believe that as a woman and a foreigner I was able to maneuver more easily between different spaces and responsibilities simply because I was less limited by (or more oblivious to) cultural and social norms and expectations.

Data collected from participant observation was recorded in the form of written field notes, some audio recordings and also photography. During weekly meetings at CIBA, I was always taking notes. The residents of *casas tomadas* knew who I was and seemed comfortable with my presence as I scribbled away in my notebooks. At house meetings I would take some notes, but often refrained if the situation was tense. When I was unable to record during an event, afterwards I would document what I remembered happening after the fact, often using descriptions and including my own thoughts and opinions. Throughout this research I have included my field notes in order to reconstruct the experience of being in the field and to describe many of the events I witnessed.

Interviews

I conducted recorded interviews with seven executive members of CIBA over the course of ten months I was in the field. Of these interviews, the majority discussed their experiences living in *casas tomadas* and how they became affiliated with CIBA. I also recorded interviews with Jorge Abasto, the director of CIBA, on four separate occasions. These were primarily semi-structured interviews in which Jorge explained the history of CIBA, the legal, political and policy issues surrounding the housing crisis in Buenos Aires, and other aspects specific to each of the houses affiliated with the organization. Most of the specific information and direct quotes by executive members originate from these semi-formal interviews. However it should be noted that I engaged in many informal and spontaneous conversations and events that were not documented but that also inform this research. For example, because I lived close to CIBA's headquarters, some of the executive members would come to my apartment after meetings. These moments offered other insights, conversations and experiences not necessarily available in other settings.

The majority of my interviews were with migrant women who had lived or were living in *casas tomadas.* In all, I conducted twenty-five informal and semiformal interviews with different Peruvian women.[11] All of these women except one were living in *casas tomadas* affiliated with CIBA. The age of the women I interviewed ranged from early twenties to late sixties. The moment they migrated and the amount of time they had lived in Buenos Aires also ranged anywhere from three to eighteen years. Almost all of

[11] See Appendix A for a copy of the questions used during interviews.

the women had at least a high school education; some had some tertiary education either in a trade or from a University. Women's experiences and family status were also quite eclectic; some women were married and had small children living with them, others had left young and older children behind in Peru. Some women had arrived to Buenos Aires to work and go to the University, others had come to make money to send back to family in Peru, and still others were caring for older mothers and grandchildren. In other words, each woman had a very unique and specific migrant and housing situation. Despite the multiple differences, all of the women included in this research were extremely resourceful and proud and had had varying degrees of success in creating a life for themselves and their families in Buenos Aires.

I was able to develop relationships with the Peruvian women included in this research through my weekly contact with them at CIBA's headquarters on Anchorena, between Rivadavia and the Train Station. Usually, I would arrive early to Wednesday's meeting, mingling and talking to some of the main members and residents. Later, once the meeting had begun I would sit and talk among the residents of the houses. I was also able to meet and develop relationships with different residents during protests and marches. The protests were always intense moments where energies were high and there was a sense of solidarity and unity around a collective struggle. There was also much traveling and downtime as we waited for everyone to arrive and prepare for the protest. These moments and events also offered opportunities to share experiences and talk with residents and members.

I allowed my relationships with the Peruvian women included in this research to develop over time before I asked to interview them. In doing so, my objective was that our interviews were as natural as possible and that the women did not feel obligated to talk but instead *wanted* to share their stories with me. Usually I was already engaged in a conversation with someone, when I would subtly approach the subject of interviewing them. If they said yes, we would plan a time and a day I could go to their house. The women always invited me to their home; no one ever suggested that we meet somewhere else. During most of the interviews I was invited to stay for lunch or dinner, or the women and their families would be waiting for me with a Peruvian meal already prepared. The significance of preparing Peruvian dishes for me was something I did not appreciate immediately. Women would sometimes explain to me about how they prepared the food and we would discuss other Peruvian dishes and practices or festivities. In hindsight, I believe that the preparation of Peruvian food was simply part of what they took from my interviews with them. In other words, my interviews were an opportunity to show who they were as Peruvian immigrants living in Buenos Aires. They did this not only by telling me their stories, but also through the production of food and by having me in their "homes".

These informal and semi-structured interviews lasted anywhere from two to four hours. Longer interviews would occur over the course of two or three days. The degree of informality and structure of the interview depended largely on the women themselves and their objectives and expectations of the interview. Sometimes I would arrive and women would immediately begin to tell me about their lives, often focusing on aspects

that they had been thinking about in anticipation of our interview. In these cases, I would let them lead the conversation and whenever possible ask specific questions without breaking up the natural flow of the interview. My main objective was to allow the interviewee the space to tell their story.

The interviews were almost always intense and emotional. Many of the women explicitly stated they were using my interview as a sort of catharsis. Others told me that they had never talked about their experiences since they had migrated to Buenos Aires. In addition to the themes and topics surrounding this research, women discussed their experiences of migrating to Buenos Aires, the hardships and difficulties they had faced at different times in their lives, and experiences of poverty, violence, loss and regret. Women often cried as they recounted different aspects and moments in their lives. Afterwards, I believe some of the women resented me for conjuring up difficult memories and intense emotions, but others told me they were grateful to have the opportunity to discuss their lives and experiences. I offered no compensation to the women whom I interviewed, however I always tried to convey my gratitude for their participation and the time they took out of their busy and hectic lives to discuss their experiences. At the end of my field research I printed out numerous photographs of many of the women, which I then gave them as presents. Despite my identity and positionality of social, financial and situational privilege, as well as the somewhat selfish and narrow objective of collecting data for personal research, I strived to create relationships and situations that were authentic and sincere and in which the women I interviewed felt comfortable and in control, but I was not always able to achieve this.

Surveys

I employed short surveys in some of the houses.[12] The objective was to be able to obtain data on other residents who I was unable to interview, and to use this information to supplement the data obtained in private interviews, to have a more complete understanding of the collective experience of living in a *casa tomada* and waiting for eviction. Although I briefly refer to the surveys in this research, I chose not to incorporate the survey data into my analysis. This is partly due to the fact that the surveys were unevenly administered in each of the houses. I was able to survey some families, but not others. At the same time I was unable to administer them in all of the houses included in this research. Thus, although the data collected offers some insight into resident's collective experiences of waiting for eviction, I concluded that the low response rate and uneven distribution meant the data were inconclusive.

A BRIEF NOTE ON POSITIONALITY: A "*YANQUI*" IN BUENOS AIRES

As a United States citizen of European, Latin American and Middle Eastern descent, my identity has always allowed me a certain degree of ambiguity in how I identify myself and how others initially perceive me. My physical identity and clothing often make it easy for me to blend into many different landscapes and communities especially in different Latin American countries. Until I speak it is not immediately clear what country or part of the world I am from. Still, in Latin America to those who I meet,

[12] See Appendix B for a copy of the survey questions.

I identify myself and (I am usually identified) as a "*gringa*", a "*yanqui*", or an "*Americana*".[13]

These terms carry different meanings for whoever uses them. Latin America has a complex and nuanced relationship with the United States. On the extreme ends of this spectrum Latin Americans may adore or despise the United States. Many may feel a little of both. When I am in Latin America I introduce myself as a *gringa* or from *Los Estados Unidos* and then begin the work of developing relationships that allow me to complicate or dispel whatever stereotypes I may represent.

Although I believe I was able to form important and genuine personal relationships that transcended my more formal role of "foreigner" and "researcher," I was also aware of my positionality as a foreign researcher attempting to uncover and explain complex and nuanced social processes about people and cultures with which I was only somewhat familiar. Questions such as, what have I missed? What did I not see? What am I getting wrong? accompanied my field research and later, the writing process. However, I have also considered what this research contributes *because of* my particular positionality as a foreigner looking in. What did I see that other native researchers would have missed or considered unimportant? Furthermore, how did my positionality as a foreigner and a woman offer me easier entrance into these spaces and experiences? Although these are questions I cannot specifically answer, I remained hyperaware of my identity and positionality in all of the stages of the research process.

CONCLUSION

This project brings together ethnographic approaches (participatory observation and informal and semi-structured interviews) to produce a research design appropriate for understanding the livelihood practices, strategies and relationships of residents of *casas tomadas* with CIBA and the State. Grounded in institutional ethnography and access theory this research employs a focus on the routine, everyday practices and relationships of different actors. Employing these micro-scale perspectives, characteristic of an institutional ethnography approach, I examine the routine practices and complex and sometimes contradictory ways that residents and CIBA cope with tenuous housing conditions, eviction and the struggle for housing and the right to remain in the city.

CHAPTER III

A Brief History of Informal Housing in Buenos Aires

HOUSING THE POOR: *CASAS TOMADAS,* HOTELS AND BOARDING HOUSES

Unlike other informal housing options, c*asas tomadas,* boarding houses, informal hotels and the population that inhabit them, occupy a peculiar space in the city in which residents are simultaneously spatially and socially connected and segregated on many levels. By remaining in a *casa tomada,* households and groups are able to remain in the city, close to their jobs, schools, education and other services and resources. They are very much part of the urban landscape and neighborhoods where they live, even as residents of informal housing move around the city from one informal situation to another, occupying temporary, precarious and liminal spaces.

The City government of Buenos Aires promotes and reinforces many of the informal housing options where the urban poor live. As a result, informal housing should be understood as directly bound with the formal public and private sectors through policies, programs and economic structures that reproduce inequality and divisions. Along this same vein, residents of informal housing like hotels, *casas tomadas* and even slum areas should not be perceived as outside of formal structures and institutions. As I argue throughout this research informal housing is intimately linked to the formal structures of the city, which both depends on and exacerbates the precarious conditions under which many "informal" dwellers are forced to live (Burgers, 1998; Duncan and Duncan, 2004; Roy, 2005; Mitchell and Heynen, 2009; Simone, 2008).

This chapter offers a brief and general historical account of the conditions and transformations in housing policy and practice in Buenos Aires during the 20th century and their impact on housing for the poor and lower classes. Throughout the 20th century, social housing policy and practices have shifted back and forth in tandem with government ideologies and political contexts. Furthermore, the urban elite and private interest groups have employed housing for their own interests and to control who has the right to the city and under what terms (Oszlak, 1991). Historically, Argentina's conservative elite has always considered Buenos Aires to be an exclusive space that they have tried to maintain for themselves. In this sense, even during periods of increased welfare policies directed at the lower classes, the poor have always existed at the margins of urban narratives, images and daily life.

Marked by limited affordable housing options, no real effective and comprehensive housing policy and a large population that struggles to remain in the city despite the imminent threat of eviction, the current housing situation in Buenos Aires has plagued the city since the late nineteenth century. In this sense, lack of affordable housing in Buenos Aires is an issue that has never been sufficiently addressed. Instead, housing policies and their desired and undesired consequences have led to the institutionalization of multiple forms of informal housing that force poor and low-income families to live in small, run-down, overcrowded and often unhealthy and unsafe quarters. More recently, since 1976 and the military government's violent expulsion and marginalization of the poor, these communities have continued to be ignored, excluded, and displaced from the city. Although the military regime ended in 1983, the neoliberal

shift of the 1990s and the financial crisis in 2001 have continued to negatively impact the city's poor. Through a brief discussion of housing practices and policies in Buenos Aires during the 20th century, the goal of this chapter is to illustrate how current housing policies and practices are part of a broader historical pattern of poor governance, exclusion and more recently, neoliberal policies. It responds to the following questions; where do the poor fit into historical and current visions of the city? And why do *casas tomadas*, hotels and other informal housing continue to be a prominent aspect of the urban landscape of Buenos Aires?

EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND TENEMENT HOUSING

There is a certain romanticism behind the history of tenement housing and European immigration to the Americas. It is the story about the journey made across the Atlantic by European immigrants to cities like New York and Buenos Aires, and their first years struggling to make a life for themselves and their family. How they lived in tight quarters, working manual labor and walking home after a hard day's work down dirty streets crowded with market stalls into small, stuffy rooms and apartments filled with family members young and old.

This story, which is very much part of the US narrative of the American Dream, is also part of Buenos Aires' narrative of struggle, achievement and prosperity. Anyone who has visited Buenos Aires is familiar with the tenement housing of El Caminito; brightly painted structures surrounded by dancers, painters, musicians and souvenirs in a kind of commemoration of Buenos Aires' vibrant and culturally rich European immigrant past. Ironically, a few blocks past the tourist areas of La Boca and scattered throughout

the city are the current manifestations of another wave of migration and struggle for a new life in this port city. But these houses and lives have a very different meaning and are usually avoided by tourists and Argentines alike.

By the beginning of the 20th century, tenement housing or *conventillos* as they are called in Argentina, had become a common housing option for poor and middle class immigrants arriving to Buenos Aires from Italy, Spain and other European countries. The tenements were run-down buildings that had been separated into different apartments or rooms to fit multiple families. Describing tenement housing in both New York City and Buenos Aires, Baily (1983) writes, "The living conditions…in both cities were generally poor. Most suffered from the effects of overcrowding, inadequate sanitary facilities, and unsatisfactory health conditions" (289).

Tenements were a solution to the housing shortage caused by the demand from waves of European immigrants arriving daily to port cities like New York and Buenos Aires. Between 1895 and 1914 the total population of Argentina initially rose from 4 million to 7.9 million and later to 15.8 million in 1947. Between 1900 and 1930 the population of Buenos Aires alone increased by over a million, with the city's population reaching over two million by 1928 (Baily, 1983).[14] With this sharp increase, the construction of tenements became particularly appealing to investors and property owners looking to make a profit. Between 1881 and 1919 tenement housing increased 63% and the number of residents rose from 65,000 in 1881 to 148,000 in 1919 (Pastrana et al.,

[14] The cities' population has remained at a little over three million inhabitants since the 1950s.

1995: 7).[15] However, for most immigrants this form of housing remained temporary, and many families were able to move to more desirable housing conditions as they continued to establish themselves in the city.

Tenements were located in the southern areas of Buenos Aires, close to the shipyards and the port area of La Boca. The upper classes had moved to the northern neighborhoods of the city, often abandoning old homes and buildings in the south, which were then revamped so that rooms could be rented out to immigrant families (Mazzeo et al., 2008). The conditions of tenements were difficult, to say the least; rents were high, the quality of rooms was insufficient and there were no regulations or legal protection for residents who were taken advantage of by tenement owners (Pastrana et al., 1995).

In 1907, when tenement housing and migration from Europe were at their peak, over 140,000 residents from 2,400 tenements protested against rent hikes demanding that rent decrease by 30%. Women played an important role in the protests, which were marred by violence by government forces against the protesters and which ultimately failed. Many families were evicted from their homes and the following year in 1908 rent prices increased without many disturbances (Baer, 1993; Pastrana et al., 1995).

It would not be until 1921 that a system of laws was finally created to protect and recognize the rights of tenants. Through the civil code laws of 1921 (Laws 11.156 and 11.157) the government granted certain rights and protections: tenants were given a housing contract, owners could no longer avoid renting to families, evictions were frozen

[15] Although tenements increased in terms of absolute numbers, they dropped in relation to total housing in the city from 20% in 1881 to 9% in 1919 (Pastrana et al 1995).

for a period of two years, and contracts could be extended for up to four years (Pastrana et al., 1995).

MID-CENTURY POLITICS AND HOUSING

In the 1940s there was an important and radical shift in housing policies from a free market system to one that was almost entirely regulated by the state. Rent prices fell, evictions were suspended and residents were able to extend contracts that were about to expire. In 1946, the government passed a series of laws that defined the renting of property as a social good and not through its market value, arguing that it "distorts the spiritual character of settlement and shelter that accompanies the family in its important mission" (Pastrana et al., 1995: 13). Once again rental prices were frozen and evictions were stopped. According to law 13.581/49 the owners of unoccupied property were required to register with the *Camara de Alquileres* (Renter Association) and offer it for rent within a month. If the owner failed to do so, the state could temporarily take over the property and rent it out. These policies greatly benefitted renters' access to housing while also contributing to buildings' decline. With few incentives, many tenement owners stopped maintaining their properties, while others abandoned them and invested in other businesses (Pastrana et al., 1995). Others took advantage of these abandoned lots, and in an effort to bypass those laws regulating tenements; they transformed them into family hotels and hostels, which ultimately meant a new form of unregulated housing.

During this postwar period Buenos Aires experienced another wave of immigration, this time from the rural areas of Argentina and neighboring countries like

Bolivia and Paraguay. These migrations exacerbated what continued to be a housing shortage for the poor and lower middle classes in Buenos Aires and lead to the development of slum neighborhoods throughout the city. By the 1950s, slum neighborhoods had quickly become a common feature of the urban landscape and a popular option for migrants arriving to the city with few resources (Carman, 2006; Aboy, 2007).

Hotels and Hostels

Despite a shift in housing policies by the Peronist government that would promote the construction of public housing throughout Buenos Aires from 1946-1955, rental and informal housing remained a precarious but popular option for urban residents (Aboy, 2007). Beginning in the 1950s, under the new system of hotels and hostels, renting out rooms once again became a profitable business for property owners, but one that left tenants even more vulnerable. Under this new form of housing, tenants were not considered rightful occupants, but rather recognized as guests and therefore excluded from the laws and protections granted under tenement housing. As a result, hotel owners and managers were able to exercise complete control over who was admitted, who was evicted, how long they could stay and how much they charged for rent (Pastrana, et al., 1995).

There were also no regulations on the size and occupancy of hotel rooms, which meant that owners could divide up large rooms into small ones in order to lodge as many people as possible. Thus, hotels and hostels were much more profitable than tenements and became a popular and viable way for owners to make money while avoiding many of

the government protections regarding rent prices and evictions from tenements and boarding houses. Only in the sixties, were laws passed to regulate the conditions of hotels and hostels, which included the quality of products and services available to "guests". These included certain regulations on the quality of the building, as well as the sanitary and health situation inside each hotel (Pastrana, et al., 1995: 16), offering little protection to long-term residents.

THE FONDO NACIONAL DE LA VIVIENDA (FONAVI): 1966-1976

In 1966 the Federal Government started to develop a series of projects for low-income housing, backed by international institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank. In 1972 the national government created the *Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda* (FONAVI) (The National Housing Fund), with the objective of constructing low-income housing that would begin to satisfy the demand in Buenos Aires and other areas throughout Argentina. Although housing practices and programs during the late sixties and early seventies lead to some structural improvements for the poor, they were largely symbolic and ultimately short-lived. FONAVI was not unsuccessful, but would never meet the demands of social housing in Buenos Aires and the rest of the country (Pastrana et al., 1995). Finally, the military coup in 1976 abruptly put an end to the majority of social-welfare programs directed at helping the poor that had characterized the mid-century period.

HOUSING AND THE CITY UNDER THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT: 1976-1983

The most violent military dictatorship in Argentina's history, in which 30,000 people disappeared and thousands more fled the country, the military government's siege

on the poor and in particular on the country's urban poor was relentless. In the context of housing, the military government enacted a set of policies and legislation whose impact on the urban poor in Buenos Aires would have devastating social and spatial effects that in many ways continue to exist today. The government evicted thousands of low-income families from Buenos Aires and destroyed their homes and livelihoods. These strategies accompanied the seemingly more benign objective by the military government to introduce neoliberal, capitalist reforms that catered specifically to traditional elite and conservative interests. Oszlak (1991) describes the military government's structural reforms as a conservative revolution from above (*desde arriba)*[16].

> A revolution… destined to "put things in their place", to "correct the sins of the past" which had happened only because of the decisions or lack thereof of weak governments that had had to deal way too much with alternatives proposed by leftist movements (Oszlak, 1991:14).

Although the military dictatorship was only in power from 1976 until 1983, it was effective in radically transforming the social and economic landscape of the country—transformations that have lasted to the present day.

DEREGULATION OF THE RENTAL MARKET

Once in power the military government almost immediately deregulated the rental market, reversing almost three decades of protectionist legislation in Argentina. Over a period of two or three years, low income families who rented inside Buenos Aires were forced to move out of their homes and were pushed into worse housing conditions, either moving into smaller spaces with fewer amenities, or moving in with other family

[16] Translation: From above

members. Many were forced to move to more marginalized areas, away from the city, their jobs and their livelihoods (Oszlak, 1991).

By deregulating the market, the government's objective was to increase the supply of rental units, which in turn would activate the market by attracting investment in housing and construction. The government argued that an increase in supply would balance prices; with greater surplus, rental prices would necessarily fall. However, the military government also passed a new construction code that made it increasingly difficult and more expensive to build in Buenos Aires. As a result, most real estate and new housing developments were directed solely at the upper classes (Oszlak, 1991: 18).

During this same period, salaries were quickly falling and unemployment was steadily increasing at a rate never before experienced in Argentina. The average salaries of the poor and middle classes dropped to half of what it cost to rent an apartment, making it increasingly impossible for them to rent anything in the city. Even with an increase in salaries in 1981, most low and middle-income households could still not afford to rent in Buenos Aires. A set of requirements, which included one or two guarantors who owned property, a deposit equal to two or three months' rent, commission, and the total amount in the contract paid for in US dollars made it impossible for much of the population to rent anything in the formal market (Pastrana et al., 1995).

The military government was also responsible for the violent eradication of slum neighborhoods and residents throughout Buenos Aires. A response to Buenos Aires' chronic problems of lack of affordable housing and economic poverty, slum

neighborhoods had remained an important option for migrants moving to the city to seek a better life. Despite their continuing prominence, no legislation had ever fully addressed the needs and reality of the residents living in *villas miserias*. Instead, patchwork policies and practices meant that different governments either tolerated or tried to eradicate them, only to see them reappear somewhere else or housing a different population.

The military government's eradication of slum dwellers and their livelihood in Buenos Aires was particularly violent. Immigrants from Bolivia and Paraguay were rounded up and sent back to their country of origin on trains reserved solely for the purpose of expelling them from the country (Oszlak, 1991). Argentine inhabitants were also pushed out of their homes and their communities, their belongings confiscated by the military and their houses burned to the ground (Jelin, 1994). Only six percent of this population returned to their cities of origin, the rest reconstructed their homes and lived in informal settlements outside of the city and often on land with no basic services (Oszlak, 1991). Occupants living in hotels, rooming houses and hostels in Buenos Aires did not fare any better. Under the provision 32.959/7, the government granted almost complete autonomy to the owners and managers of these establishments (Pastrana et al., 1995). Once again, inhabitants of hotels, rooming houses and hostels had very few legal rights or protections.

Under the broad context of the political and social upheaval of the military dictatorship, the displacement of the poor from Buenos Aires is only one more example of the ubiquitous violence of the daily life of the Argentine people during this period. In most cases, the violence was not arbitrary and was almost always targeted at specific

communities. In one instance, the military government forcefully eradicated poor families from slum neighborhoods in the richer, northern neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, only to put them in "ghettos" (publically funded high rises) in the southern areas of the city (Bettanin, 2010).

These policies and practices affected over half a million people living in Buenos Aires and severely transformed the city, not only by displacing communities, but also by contributing to the long-term spatial marginalization and social stratification of the city (Carman, 2006). Not surprisingly, in Buenos Aires between 1978 and 1988 the population of tenants in Buenos Aires dropped from 19.1% to 12.9% (Pastrana et al., 1995). Census data from 1970 and 1980 also shows that the city's population dropped by over 200,000 people (Oszlak, 1991:46).[17] According to Oszlak, the military government's practices were designed specifically to create a new hierarchy of urban space and the place of the poor:

> …The adoption of these policies illustrates the effect of a new understanding of the hierarchy of urban space, the function of the city and the place that the popular sectors *should*[18] occupy. In other words, it is a new and coherent appreciation for the right to urban space. This appreciation, supported by the convergence of ideological, strategic y ecological considerations, would present the city as a place of residency for "decent people", like the showcase of the country, like the physical space that returns and reinforces values of order, equity, well-being, immaculate appearance, the absence (at least visible) of poverty, marginality, decline and their epiphenomenon (delinquency, subversion, popular uprisings) (Oszlak, 1991: 29).

In other words, the military government's policies radically and purposely redefined the city in terms of who had a right to it and who did not. In a 1980 interview,

[17] Oszlak argues that this number is undoubtedly much higher based on census data from 1974 and 1975.
[18] The emphasis is mine.

widely cited by many scholars, the Mayor of Buenos Aires at the time was quoted as saying:

> Not just anyone can live here. We need to make a collective effort to improve the habitat, the health and hygiene conditions [of the city]. Specifically, living in Buenos Aires isn't just for anyone, but for those who really deserve it, for the person who accepts the rules of community living and efficiency. We must have a better city for the best people (Oszlak, 1991 in Carmán, 2006: 56).

The basic goal of the military government, therefore, was in fact to evict the poor and working-class residents from Buenos Aires by effectively pushing them out of the city through a series of economic and social policies, and acts of blatant and direct violence and destruction. Like Oszlak (1991), Bettanin (2010) argues that the military government was quite successful in accomplishing these objectives. They eradicated almost all of the slum neighborhoods and their inhabitants and radically and permanently transformed the social and spatial makeup of the city.

LEGACIES OF THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

The military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983 ended in financial ruin, a lost war against Britain and a polarized society. It also left in its wake; 30,000 disappeared, 10,000 political prisoners, 500 children clandestinely adopted by families directly involved with the military government and given false identities, thousands exiled, and 500 detention centers where much of the violence took place (Bettanin, 2010). Add to this the number of soldiers who died during the war with Britain and the terror that was experienced daily by part of the population, and this period is one of the darkest and most violent in Argentina's history. Yet, the immediate and long-term effects of the more egregious

social and economic policies on the urban poor are often forgotten or overlooked when discussing the violence from this period. Instead, many of the policies and practices from this era remain in place today in the form of free-market, liberal policies.

> [The Military Government's] state policy was possible because it was congruent with the individualist, elitist and private conception of social organization imposed on distinct levels of political life. It exalted property as inalienable and condemned any kind of semi-free or precarious use [of it] (Oszlak 1991: 29-30 in Carmán, 2006: 57).

The military government exacerbated a condition of exclusion and marginalization through policies and actions that violently targeted the poor in their most basic and fundamental setting—the home. Since this period, housing remains part of a liberal narrative which puts above all else the right to private property and ownership. At the same time, without broader and more effective policies that address the housing crisis in Buenos Aires, the poor continue to be blocked from accessing any of the few stable housing options available inside Buenos Aires.

1990S AND NEOLIBERALISM

With the return to democratic rule, very little was done to address the ongoing problem of housing in Argentina.[19] In 1984, the newly elected government passed a law that stipulated the annual construction of 60,000 homes, financed with public funds (Rodriguez, 2005). According to Rodriguez, this objective remained well below the 200,000 houses needed to effectively tackle the deficit, which was calculated at

[19] Oszlak has argued that the most important contribution made by the government in terms of housing and the poor, was to ignore the thousands of people moving back into the city, after being forcefully evicted by the military government (1991).

2,500,000 housing units at the time. Moreover, the government never even met its original goal. As Rodriguez (2005) highlights, despite legislature directed at improving the housing situation in the city, public investment only increased slightly from .67% during the military government to .71% from 1984 to 1988. Strikingly, in the 1990s under President Carlos Menem, investment in public housing would drop to a record low of .53% (Rodriguez, 2005).

Passed in 1984 one year after the end of the military government, the Tenant Law tied the cost of rent to the cost of living, and stipulated the required documents and payments necessary to rent in the city. These included a deposit based on the number of years of the contract, a *garantía)* and payment in US dollars. Hotels and boarding houses were not covered under this law and instead remained under the category of tourist hotels. What this meant in no uncertain terms was that low-income families were knowingly excluded from renting in the formal market. It also left families who lived in hotels and pensions (as one of the few options available to them) with few if any rights or protections.

RETURNING TO THE CITY

After the return to democracy, the population that had been violently pushed out of the city during the military dictatorship began to return and a new form of informal housing—the occupation of empty buildings throughout Buenos Aires—became popular (Rodriguez, 2005). With few options and a chronic housing deficit that plagued the city and the surrounding areas, much of the population returning to the city found refuge in state and privately owned empty and abandoned homes, buildings and land around the

city. Like Oszlak (1991), Rodriguez (2005) argues that publically (and privately) the government ignored what was happening; no policies or laws were created to address the situation of this particular population, and although some government assistance was made available, it was not administered in any consistent or uniform way.

As Oszlak (1991) suggests, the government's response offered respite to the poor and lower classes in the informal housing sector, because they were able to return to the city with few limitations. In essence, being left alone was an improvement from being violently targeted and forcibly pushed out of the city. Yet, by maintaining liberal housing policies introduced during the military regime and also ignoring the housing plight of the lower classes, the government's response only reproduced the marginalization and socio-spatial exclusion that many of the urban poor had experienced in one form or another for decades.

In the context of neoliberal market reforms begun during the military government, this *modus operandi* has only continued to contribute to the impoverishment of families and subsequent generations living informally and illegally throughout the city. Despite families' ability to access different informal strategies to remain in the city close to social networks and basic resources, the insecurity and instability that characterize these spaces only reproduce their informality and limit opportunities for social and spatial mobility. As one interviewee explained to me, "We have three generations of men who are

unemployed living in the slums. What do you think it does to a boy to never have seen his father go to work?"[20]

NEOLIBERALISM UNDER MENEM

The neoliberal government of the nineties, under Carlos Raul Meném, reinforced and broadened many of the free market institutional practices inherited from the military and the subsequent democratic government in the eighties. Under Menem, the government created programs and policies to address certain aspects of the housing deficit in Buenos Aires through a neoliberal framework of decentralization and by incorporating social organizations and NGOs. Within this hyper-neoliberal context, informality became increasingly synonymous with illegality and a threat to Argentina's development and global economic prestige. Once again, the lower classes were evicted from the city; however this time it was not political rhetoric that pushed these actions, but rather the free market development of the neoliberal city. The few forms of government assistance and policies that addressed the housing crisis as a social problem were quickly subjugated to other strategies and policies directed at private investment for the purpose of "improving" the city in the form of urban development through gentrification (Rodriguez, 2005; Carman, 2006).

By 1993, due to intense international investment and development happening throughout the city, evictions from occupied houses and slum neighborhoods again

[20] Excerpt is from my interview with Jorge Abasto, the director of *Coordinadora de Inquilinos de Buenos Aires* (CIBA) on September 9, 2009.

became commonplace, fueled by the market economy and radically transforming the urban landscape.

> In effect, during [the nineties] powerful sectors of the state, beneficiaries of privatizations of businesses and real estate, began to make their demands known. In order to carry out their activities and investments, they required spaces centrally located and easily accessible [in the city]. The demands of these interest groups and the inability of the municipal government to have any say in the matter, lead to the end of the *impasse* [that had defined the policies] of the 80s. A series of actions were applied, based on policies of exclusion directed at the popular sectors living in areas for which they were unable to compete compared to the power of other interest groups (Rodriguez, 2005: 72-73).

The nineties in Buenos Aires meant increasing economic instability and high unemployment rates, especially among the poor. Unable to pay rent, many poor and working class families were forced to move into shantytowns and other forms of informal housing inside and outside of the city. Evictions became increasingly frequent even while inhabitants organized to protest against the growing costs of rent. At the same time, hotel and boarding house owners and managers became more powerful due to government-sponsored programs. Paying rent at market prices, the city government directly contracted hotels and boarding houses to place families that were homeless, evicted or that were to be temporarily relocated. This partnership contributed to the institutionalization of the hotels and boarding houses as a viable and popular form of informal housing for the poor—directly sponsored and promoted by the city government. It also led to an increase in prices in most hotels even for those families not receiving aid from the government. At the same time, squatting of land and the occupation of empty houses and buildings in and around Buenos Aires began to receive more attention,

prompting the government to give complete freedom to the federal police to "compulsively" evict inhabitants from these spaces, which they did (Rodriguez, 2005).

THE "RIGHT" TO HOUSING

In 1996, the city constitution explicitly recognized housing as a universal right. Stating, "…the City recognizes the right to decent housing and adequate habitat," this legal document offered a set of guidelines to promote this reality on the ground:

1. To progressively resolve the housing deficit in infrastructure and services, giving priority to the people and the sectors in critical poverty with special needs for scarce resources.
2. To promote/sponsor the development of empty buildings, promoting the local management of plans, the urban and social integration of the marginalized inhabitants, the recuperation of precarious housing and the regularization of land and housing with the objective of permanent settlement.
3. To regulate those establishments that offer temporary shelter (Rodriguez, 2005:86-87).

It was these types of goals that were supposed to be incorporated into the new city government of Buenos Aires' policies on housing. During the first few years of the new city government, some actions were taken to try to improve the quality of resources and add more housing in the slum neighborhoods around the city. Additionally, some of the older tenements in the southern areas of the city saw some structural improvements. However, other types of informal housing, like family hotels, were not recognized as part of the housing problem and went largely overlooked despite the government's ongoing partnership with these establishments.[21] As in the past, despite signs of programs and

[21] Family hotel establishments in Buenos Aires have largely been exempt from many of the laws created to protect tenants. This is because under hotel legislation residents are not recognized as such, but rather as 'visitors'.

actions targeting the on-going housing crisis in Buenos Aires, the deficit and chronic exclusion of the lower classes from access to the city, its resources and housing stability continued.

THE HOUSING CRISIS: 2001-2013

For most of the 21st century, the housing deficit in Buenos Aires has continued to be addressed through two principal and particularly incongruous programs. *El programa de Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle* (AFSC), which focuses on the immediate and short term needs of families being evicted, and the *Ley 341,* which offers low interest loans to low-income families and cooperatives interested in purchasing and developing land individually or collectively. The program, Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle (AFSC), was introduced in 2002 in response to growing criticism by various social organizations regarding a similar program, *Atención a Casos de Emergencia Individual y Familiar* (ACEIF) (Veron, 2011). ACEIF had helped individuals and families evicted from their home due to sickness, unemployment, or nonpayment, by housing them in hotels subsidized by the city government. However, residents of the hotels were constantly denouncing the government for housing them in buildings that did not meet even the most minimal standards for safety and hygiene. Entire families lived in small rooms and other makeshift spaces, often without windows or ventilation. At the same time, what had originally been envisioned as a temporary housing solution had become increasingly permanent. The government had essentially put itself in a difficult position: ACEIF was supposed to help families avoid eviction by temporarily housing them in

hotels. However, without other alternative housing, the government had no other option but to continue to keep families in hotels year after year (Veron, 2011).

When families began to complain about the conditions in the hotels, and social organizations began to call for an end to the program, the city government responded by introducing the AFSC program, which focused on offering temporary housing subsidies to the poor instead of directly housing them in hotels and boarding houses. In other words, rather than responding to the complaints by improving the conditions in hotels and boarding houses—the same conditions continue to exist today—the city government introduced the AFSC, which meant that it was no longer responsible for the location and conditions under which families were living.

Instead, the AFSC offers poor families the opportunity to receive a monthly subsidy meant to help offset the cost of rent or in some cases, to be used toward the purchasing of materials to build a home. The law stipulates that recipients cannot use the subsidy to rent in shantytowns or in informal settlements, which means they are left with the option of renting in hotels, boarding houses or tenements. Under the AFSC, poor families no longer rely directly on the government to house them, but remain in highly ambiguous and unstable conditions, because hotel owners and managers can deny housing to whomever and whenever they choose. Furthermore, the conditions of the hotels where many families use the subsidy to rent a room are at best, small, crowded and run down.

THE EMERGENCIA HABITACIONAL

Introduced in 2004, the Law *Emergencia Habitacional* formally acknowledged the lack of stable housing and decent living conditions for an important part of the population in Buenos Aires. It was also meant to curb the shortcomings of current housing policies and recognized that the current system was in violation of one's basic human right explicitly stated in the Constitution (Defensoria, 2007, Veron, 2011). Under the emergency housing act, the legislative committee pushed for a three year suspension of evictions from government owned buildings, arguing that this period of time would allow for the completion of projects geared toward affordable housing. Instead, since 2004 the Emergencia Habitacional has been extended every three years; first in 2007 and again in 2010. Furthermore, the city's executive branch has consistently vetoed the suspension of evictions, an important piece of the legislature, in that it recognized the few options and alternatives available to the poor.

Instead, evictions are ongoing and have been directly incorporated into the AFSC program. Beginning in 2008, the executive branch modified the definition of the particular moment when a person was eligible to receive the subsidy. Prior to the decree 960/08 a beneficiary was defined as someone who "found themselves *at risk of being evicted* or in an *imminent situation of becoming* homeless" (From Decree 960/08 in Veron, 2011). This meant that prior to the modification, one could negotiate receiving the subsidy *before* they were evicted, allowing families to move out at an earlier date and to avoid the violence and trauma of eviction.

Since 2008 however, it is now necessary to be present and essentially inhabiting the premise on the day of eviction in order to be eligible to receive the subsidy. In practice, this means that in order to receive the subsidy, families are forced to experience the eviction process, even when they might have the option to avoid it. In many evictions the families do not know when they will be evicted until only a few days before, which only adds to the stress, instability and violence of being forcibly removed from one's home. Since it is a particularly young demographic who live in hotels, boarding houses and squatter homes, this also means that a considerable number of young children must witness these evictions, which, even when they occur without any major incident, are highly stressful, traumatic and humiliating for all families.

On the day of eviction, in the early morning hours and amidst the chaos and violence of moving one's personal belongings onto the street and ensuring they do not get stolen, damaged or mixed in with other's furniture and belongings, families are also required to check in with a social worker who has each families' name. They must then go to the *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social* (Welfare Office), in order to receive the initial payment of $1800.00 pesos (approximately $300 dollars)[22]. All of this occurs in the presence of at least two or more police officers in order to guarantee the eviction occurs quickly and without disruptions.

[22] Since 2009 the subsidy amount has increased from $450 pesos in 2009 to $700 pesos in 2012 to $1800 pesos in 2013. Residents can receive this amount for a period of up to ten months. It should be noted that inflation in Argentina increased on average between 10-11% during this period.

LEY 341: PROGRAMA DE AUTOGESTIÓN PARA LA VIVIENDA

A second program, the *Programa de Autogestión para la Vivienda* or *Ley 341,* as it is commonly called, is the product of three distinct but related processes: neoliberal reforms during the 1990s, the increasing urgency or severity of the housing crisis, particularly during the 1990s, and the activism of social organizations to reinforce their member's rights to housing and the city (Thomasz, 2008). Law 341 was first passed in February 2000 and extended in December of 2002 by the city's legislature as a strategy directed at "assisting and resolving" the city's housing problem, as presented in the context of the Emergencia Habitacional (Thomasz, 2008). The original objectives behind the program were to offer low-interest housing loans and credits to individuals or families in "a critical housing situation", which would aid in the construction, purchase or improvement of a home. In particular, the program gave priority to those families that were waiting to be evicted by court order. Ley 341 offered an impetus for the development of housing cooperatives that allowed multiple families to organize together to receive home loans and to be responsible for the administering of the funds and the development of the land.

Social and community organizations were originally at the heart of the law and played a very influential role during the first two years of the program. However, modifications in the law increasingly frustrated and limited organizations' authority and input. In 2003, the changes made to the law took much of the decision making out of the hands of the organizations and put them into the hands of technical specialists and professionals on the government's payroll. Additionally, with each modification the

degree of bureaucracy significantly increased, making the process longer and more arduous. It now literally takes years for housing cooperatives and individuals to successfully complete all of the paperwork, meet the requirements, and finally receive the land or home. Even the President of the *Instituto de Vivienda de la Ciudad* (IVC), the department in charge of Ley 341 and of executing the housing policy for the city, observed that Ley 341 was no longer directed at resolving the housing emergency, even though it had originally been designed for this purpose (Thomasz, 2008:140). In 2006 the city government once again modified Ley 341, intensifying the bureaucratic process and further subordinating the social organizations involved. In particular, the title of the land and real estate, originally in the name of the social organizations receiving the loans, is now under the name and tutelage of the Instituto de Vivienda de la Ciudad (IVC) (Thomasz, 2008).

In addition to the rising bureaucracy that has severely limited organizations' and individual's opportunities to access funds through the Ley 341, since 2006 the executive branch of the city government has continued to reduce public funding for the *IVC,* the office in charge of the Ley 341 and other housing programs and aid in Buenos Aires (Veron, 2010/2011). In 2006, annual funding for the IVC was 322 million pesos, dropping to 221 million pesos for the following year. In 2009 funding dropped from $519 million to a mere $100 million pesos, just enough to cover employee's salaries for that year. This action denied social organizations the opportunity to advance in the objective of constructing housing for their members, many of which had already waited years for funding, and sent a clear message about the city government's priorities in terms of long-

term solutions to the housing problem in Buenos Aires. In the meantime, the government has continued to increase the budget for the *AFSC* and other programs tied to the welfare office. From 2008 to 2010 the amount of funding increased from approximately 62.6 million to 101.1 million pesos, while the number of subsidies paid out increased from 7,780 families in 2007 to 10,800 in 2010 (Veron, 2012).[23] In other words, those programs that focus on addressing the immediate and temporary needs of poor families in the area of housing have seen an increase in funding, while other programs designed to permanently address the long term needs of the city through public and affordable housing for the lower classes, have experienced a significant reduction in funding. Instead of slowing down the rate of evictions under the Emergencia Habitacional, evictions have not only increased, but have become part and parcel with the main policies and practices of the city government in addressing their housing "problem". Despite the Emergencia Habitacional the housing situation for informal inhabitants of Buenos Aires has become increasingly tenuous since 2000.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the nineteenth century, informal and precarious housing in the form of tenements, boarding houses and later, slums, family hotels and squatter houses have been—and continue to be—an important part of the urban landscape in Buenos Aires. After reviewing the different policies throughout the 20th century, what is most prominent

[23] These numbers by no means illustrate the total number of evictions that occur in Buenos Aires annually. Not all families and individuals who are evicted receive the subsidy and families are only allowed to receive the subsidy once, therefore if they are evicted again (which is common) they cannot receive the subsidy again.

is the absence of any long-term and effective policies designed to adequately address the problem of housing for the poor and lower classes of the city. Populist and elitist in nature, state governments and later city governments have enacted policies that have largely ignored the broader issues surrounding housing options for the poor. Instead, since the late 19th century, housing policies have been closely tied to party politics and ideologies, and have shifted back and forth between those designed to regulate the market by controlling rent prices and freezing evictions, and those geared toward deregulation and free market practices. These fluctuating government strategies have consolidated the informal housing sector of tenements, hotels, slums and informal settlements as the only real options for the poor and lower-middle classes who do not have the economic and social capital required to access Buenos Aires' formal housing market.

Through this summary of the history of housing policies in Argentina and Buenos Aires, it seems clear that, except for certain short historical periods, the poor and lower middle classes have remained outside social, economic and political visions of Buenos Aires. The military government from 1976 to 1983, although much more violent in their practices and outcomes, only reinforced what many in Argentina already believed: Buenos Aires is not for the lower classes. By continuing policies and practices introduced by the military government and ignoring the city's housing problem, government practices since the return to democracy have only continued to keep the poor and lower classes at the margins of any spatial and social imaginings and development of the city.

The action (and inaction) of the national and city governments over time, and in particular after 1983, illustrate how the presence of the poor and lower classes are at best ignored and at worst, violently attacked and pushed out. One case in point is the UCEP. In recent years, the city government under the leadership of Mauricio Macri and the PRO, a right-wing conservative party, reintroduced strategies to evict the homeless from the city through the *Unidad de Control del Espacio Público* (UCEP), a group of 'thugs' paid by the city government to clandestinely and violently chase out and threaten the homeless. Although the UCEP was eventually disbanded due to pressure from activists and social organizations, their actions resulted in the physical suffering, displacement and even death of some of the city's most vulnerable population.

The chronic instability that the poor and lower classes experience is representative of the manner in which they are excluded from any right to the city. Without the resources or the right to shelter, from which to access other urban resources and spaces, Buenos Aires' poor and lower classes are systematically marginalized from the right to the city. In other words, by maintaining the poor in precarious and unstable conditions, the city government controls their social and spatial mobility by keeping them compliant and "in their place", one that remains outside the government and elite class' imaginations and narratives of Buenos Aires.

CHAPTER IV

Power, Negotiation and Subordination in the Struggle for Housing in Buenos Aires

INTRODUCTION

Residents of *casas tomadas* engage in relationships and develop strategies that are based on real and perceived reliance on others to remain inside their homes, access other housing options inside Buenos Aires and once they are evicted, receive the government funded housing subsidy. This chapter explores the everyday struggle for housing and the right to remain in the city and access urban resources and services, through an analysis of the internal dynamics, interactions and relationships between residents of *casas tomadas*, CIBA and the city government sponsored housing subsidy. I show that despite CIBA's ambitions and their struggle to change the social and political conditions for the poor in Buenos Aires, residents operate under other assumptions and goals in part because of the temporal and spatial restraints under which residents live. Instead, residents participate in CIBA's activities and events in order to secure access to basic, immediate needs. These core differences reproduce relationships of subordination and dependence that are only exacerbated and reinforced through the city government housing subsidy.

I begin by introducing the universe of *casas tomadas*. I discuss the origins and living conditions, and residents' initial reactions when they learn they will be evicted. Subsequently, I further introduce the organization Coordinadora de Inquilinos de Buenos Aires (CIBA) and explore the demands and expectations that exist between CIBA and the residents of *casas tomadas* once they begin working together. Finally, I discuss the symbolic and practical significance of the subsidy, formally known as the city

government program Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle (ASFC), as a tool for negotiation and control in the struggle for housing and to the right to the city in Buenos Aires.

CASAS TOMADAS

Casas tomadas are usually empty buildings, houses or apartments that have been taken over by individuals who then rent out or sell rooms to make a profit. They can also refer to informal family hotels and multi-family houses that have fallen into eviction for different reasons. The *casas tomadas* included in this research were informal family hotels or homes in which residents were living and paying rent when they learned that they would be evicted.

The population inside each *casa tomada* is usually quite heterogeneous and may include single mothers, traditional nuclear families, extended families, transvestite couples, drug dealers, and elderly men and women. In the houses with which I became familiar, residents originated from many different places and countries: Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, the Northern provinces of Argentina and Peruvians, who often represented the majority population.[24]

Despite these differences, the common characteristic that all of families living in *casas tomadas* shared was the physical conditions in which they lived. In *casas tomadas,* each family lives in one bedroom where they usually watch television, prepare food, eat, and store all of their belongings, study and sleep. Nuclear or extended families of up to

[24] In Argentina, Peruvians are stereotypically identified with living in *casas tomadas.* This is not always the case, and may have been true in my research due to the fact that CIBA and the houses I was working in are all located in the neighborhood of Abasto, where a large community of Peruvian immigrants has settled.

four, five or six people may live in a room measuring approximately 12 X 12 feet or smaller, sometimes without windows or ventilation (Fig. 4.1). Kitchens are usually sparse and depending on the size, may have one or two ovens, or small gas burners. Although the kitchens are not necessarily clean, they are usually orderly, because after cooking residents must put everything back in their room; if they leave anything out they risk having it stolen (Fig. 4.2, 4.3) . Bathrooms are also rundown, sometimes with dripping sinks and showers, broken mirrors, overflowing trash bins and toilets that usually do not flush properly or constantly leak (Fig. 4.4, 4.5). Some of the houses do not have hot water and electric and gas connections are often old and haphazardly installed. People and objects take up every part of the houses, as described below in Sonia's account of her experience living in a room underneath the staircase with numerous family members at different times (also see Fig. 4.6 and 4.7).

Sonia

> I rented a room in a house. The room was very small and it was below a staircase. We put the bed under the stairs and sometimes when the steps came loose they would fall on us when people walked on them. We also had a small bookcase on which we would pile all of our belongings. At one point my sister was living with us and my husband's brother from Jujuy[25] and two of my cousins came to visit. There were six of us and we all slept in that bedroom. We took the bed frame out and all slept on mattresses on the floor. [My husband and I, and later my son] lived there for nine years until we were evicted.

[25] Jujuy is a city and Province in the North of Argentina on the border with Bolivia and Chile.

As Sonia's account illustrates, even before the eviction process begins and residents stop paying rent, these buildings are old, dilapidated and poorly constructed. Most *casas tomadas* previously run as hotels never met government standards to be formally recognized as family hotels because they were in such disrepair.[26] The following examples demonstrate the dire conditions in which residents are forced to live even before they begin the eviction process:

Rocio and Yolanda

When Rocio first arrived to Buenos Aires from Peru she shared a room with her sister in a small hotel in Abasto, each paying $200 pesos ($37 USD) a month. When Rocio's husband and son were going to arrive in Buenos Aires she needed to find a place for the three of them to live. When Rocio's son arrived a few weeks after her husband, the manager of the hotel where Rocio was living did not want to let him in and would not allow him take a shower. Rocio finally had to go to the owner who told the manager that the son could stay. But Rocio said the room was in very bad condition. The ceiling was moldy and drooped down over the bed. When it rained, the ceiling would leak, but the owner refused to repair it, or to even have Rocio and her husband fix it and discount the cost from their rent.

Yolanda, another Peruvian woman who was living in a *casa tomada* that had previously functioned as a hotel, described how they had fallen into the eviction process because they refused to continue to pay rent until the owner started to make repairs and improvements on each of the rooms. She explained to me,

[26] The city government regulates the different types of hotels that exist in the city and has a list of rules and regulations that they must follow based on their particular status.

> I've been here since 1999. Ten years. We came in paying $250 pesos—that is what we paid. And three years ago, when we stopped paying, we were paying $300 pesos. For this crap! What happened was this: The house is in bad shape, and it was always like that. We complained to the owner to please fix the room up because it leaked, he would say, "yes, yes, tomorrow I'll fix it up, tomorrow I'll do it…" I'd say, "please! We pay our rent; we pay (*nosotros cumplimos*), right?" And then he'd say, "ok, ok I'll fix it on Friday." Friday would come and go and he wouldn't fix the room. At one point he wanted to increase the rent to $400 pesos ($74 USD) a month, which at that time was a lot of money! And we said no. I told him that if he wanted to increase the rent that he had to fix the bedrooms, the kitchen and everything else. At least paint my bedroom, I told him!

Other women I interviewed told similar stories of living under extremely poor conditions, but like Rocio and Yolanda, when they asked or demanded that something be fixed, they were denied.

Wingate-Lewinson et al., (2010) have characterized residents of long-term hotel living, as being in an ambiguous position, in which they are "situated between the categories of being housed and being not housed, as well as between having a home and being homeless." They argue that this liminal condition can "elicit strong and confusing emotions as well as intense anguish and grief" (14). Residents of *casas tomadas* also live in different conditions of liminality and ambiguity as they wait to be evicted from their home. The women's stories throughout this research demonstrate different degrees of confusion, frustration and sadness, even as they struggle to maintain some control over the spaces where they live.

Once residents receive a notice of eviction this liminal state is only heightened, as they only have a few days to find a lawyer or organization to represent them. If they do, the eviction process is extended and may take anywhere from six months to three years or longer as the case begins to make its way through the courts.[27] Sonia lived in a house for four years before she found out that it was a *casa tomada* and that she was paying rent to someone who had no legal right to the house.

Sonia

> When I arrived to that house, there was a friend of mine already living there and a manager who would come to collect the rent. We always paid. After about two or three years we found a letter that said we were going to be evicted. We said, "How are they going to evict us if we pay our rent?" Then we found out it wasn't the owner. When we realized what was happening we stopped paying rent and we went to CIBA. We were evicted because supposedly the house belonged to a charity organization and they were going to sell it. Now when I walk past there the house has a big lock on it. It's the same. They didn't do anything. They kicked us out and the house is still empty. We fixed a lot of things in that house, the electricity, and the water… so we could live a little better.

Given these already ambiguous and liminal conditions, the shift from living in an informal hotel and paying rent, to living in a so-called *casa tomada* awaiting eviction is subtle on some levels and quite dramatic on others. Suddenly, residents are "intruders" (*okupas*) living in a space that belongs to *someone*, to *no one*, and to *everyone*. Residents

[27] Changes in the legal proceedings in recent years have meant that cases are increasingly taking less time.

are in limbo—they know that they will eventually be forced to leave, but hope that "someone" will let them stay.

In the case of residents of *casas tomadas,* an already difficult living situation is heightened once residents find out they are going to be evicted, without any real certainty about when and how it will occur, what options are available, and whom to trust. There is a sense of urgency shared by residents of *casas tomadas* that is grounded in their struggle to hold some control over their lives, particularly in day-to-day situations in which they feel (and know) they have very little power. It is in this moment of heightened anxiety, uncertainty and desperation that the residents of *casas tomadas* first approach CIBA.

Figure 4.1 Bedroom of Family of Four

Source: J. Brookings 2009

Figure 4.2 Kitchen in *Gardel*

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 4.3 Kitchen in *Corrientes 3050*

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 4.4 Bathroom with Mold

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 4.5: Bathroom with Broken Sink

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 4.6: Oven located in Hallway

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 4.7: Balconies used for Storage

Source: Munoz 2009

COORDINADORA DE INQUILINOS DE BUENOS AIRES (CIBA)

CIBA is an organization dedicated to working with households at risk of being evicted from their homes. The organization is made up of three lawyers, approximately six to eight individuals who represent the executive-members, plus the residents of *casas tomadas* or resident-members. When residents approach CIBA, executive members evaluate the case, explain the legal situation to residents, and the parties decide if it is in their interest to work together. Afterwards, if the residents agree to work with CIBA, the case is passed to one of three lawyers who work with the organization for a small, monthly fee. CIBA's second and primary role is as an activist and political organization that promotes housing rights for the poor in Buenos Aires. When residents begin to work with CIBA, they are asked to participate in protests, marches and other strategies directed at pressuring the city government to develop comprehensive housing policies and practices for the urban poor and lower middle classes. Carla's account below offers an example of how residents of *casas tomadas* and CIBA often begin working together.

Carla

Carla is a young Peruvian woman with a husband and a two-year-old daughter. She lives in a *casa tomada* with her mother and two sisters and other families from Argentina and Paraguay. Carla is lucky, because her family and the other residents they live with are currently not at risk of being evicted since no one has claimed the house for over ten years. CIBA placed Carla and her family there after they were evicted from another *casa tomada,* an old clinic where her mother and sister had purchased rooms before Carla and her husband arrived from Lima. "When we found out we were going to be evicted, we were desperate thinking where are we going to go? Then a policeman

suggested we go to an organization called CIBA that defends the people living in *casas tomadas.* 'Why don't you see if they can help you?'" As Carla explained, "[A] small group from the house, good people, working class and honest people went to CIBA and met with them." With the help of CIBA, Carla and the rest of the families in the house were able to resist the eviction and remain in the house for a few more months. In return, CIBA required that they participate in marches and protests and pay a monthly quota of $20 pesos ($5 USD) a month. At first, Carla did not want to participate in the protests because, "I felt… how can I go out there? They are going to see me on television! But later I realized, because of CIBA I saw the need to fight so they don't evict you from your home." Carla was a regular participant in the movement and during the first few months of my field research I saw her regularly at meetings and protests. This was not common among most of the residents from the other houses. As I discuss later on in this research, the degree of participation by the residents in *casas tomadas* is not consistent and is based on each individual, the internal organization of the house and a series of other factors. Furthermore, many residents inside *casas tomadas* have no interest whatsoever in participating in CIBA or having them involved with their house.

Jorge Abasto

Although CIBA boasts no formal hierarchy, my first introduction to the organization was through a meeting with the "director," Jorge Abasto.[28] Jorge Abasto has struggled for poor communities' housing rights for years. In his late forties, he is tall with a boyish haircut, thick glasses and a reserved demeanor. His knowledge of the

[28] Pseudonym

city's housing policies and laws is exhaustive and he relays information in a manner that is quick, bookish and matter of fact. Jorge *is* CIBA, in the sense that without his leadership the organization would cease to exist. Like many of the leaders of social organizations in and around Buenos Aires, he is steadfast and dogged in his ideological beliefs, in a way that is reminiscent of the Latin American Left from before the nineties. However, unlike many of the leaders that I met, Jorge's commitment and struggle for social justice seemed to come from a more idealistic and intellectual place than a political or personal one. As such, although he could be a stubborn and divisive figure at times—even causing conflict in the leadership ranks of CIBA—Jorge Abasto was perceived as someone who genuinely lived by his political and social convictions. Many of the member-residents who had participated in the movement for many years shared this sentiment. As Julia, an older woman in her seventies said smiling, "Jorge is a good person. When I look at him I see the face of Christ."

Jorge and I met in the office of CIBA's headquarters, an old house on Anchorena between the *Once* train station and Avenida Rivadavia (Fig. 4.8). *Anchorena*, as the house is commonly called, is large and run down, with three or four rooms, a large living room area where CIBA and other organizations have meetings and events, and a kitchen and bathroom. The kitchen is simple and run down but clean and regularly used by different members for fund raising events and also to make empanadas and other snacks to sell during CIBA's weekly meeting on Wednesday evenings when *Anchorena* is bustling with people (Fig. 4.9).

Figure 4.8: Entrance to CIBA

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 4.9: Kitchen Space in CIBA headquarters

Source: Munoz 2009

Jorge described CIBA as "a social organization that struggled for the right to housing," explaining, "It is a right that theoretically is guaranteed by the Federal and City Constitutions, but in reality it is not the case." CIBA uses legal and unauthorized practices to help families remain in their homes, and will often organize resistance to evictions in order to buy the families more time in the houses or as a negotiating tactic with the city government. CIBA's strategies also include organizing residents politically both inside and outside the houses as part of a larger social movement struggling for social change. Jorge explained to me that "there are a lot of people that suffer this problem [of housing] and they aren't organized, they aren't ready to defend or fight for their rights, that is why it is so difficult to change this reality."

Despite CIBA's stated objectives of organizing residents and struggling for the right to housing, the reality on the ground is often very different. Instead, residents and CIBA engage in a particular dynamic that reflects the precarious nature and confusion that families experience inside *casas tomadas*. Residents approach CIBA in a state of heightened vulnerability and confusion. As such, they willingly (and reluctantly) put their fate in the hands of the organization, hoping that CIBA will "resolve" their housing situation either by helping them remain in the house indefinitely or finding them another place to live. Like the residents of *Villa Inflamable* that Javier Auyero and Débora Swistun write about in their 2009 book, "*Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown"* residents of *casas tomadas* "place all their hopes in what the government, the companies, or lawyers and judges will do *on their behalf,* not on what they can jointly achieve…" (133). This makes sense when framed using an access theory

approach, which argues that access to particular resources are achieved through relationships with those who have control over those resources. As such, upon entering into these relationships people begin to "act in certain ways without any apparent coercion" (Foucault, 1978, in Ribot and Peluso: 156). Residents from *casas tomadas* view CIBA as controlling their access to certain resources. As a result, they engage in certain types of relationships and strategies with CIBA, which they hope will allow them to secure access to necessary resources.

CIBA, on the other hand, never promises to "solve" residents' housing problems, but instead rallies them to collectively organize and struggle for lofty goals and more radical and permanent change. However, CIBA's rhetoric and rallying calls are often reinterpreted or projected back onto CIBA by residents who are desperate to find someone or something that will provide a practical and immediate solution so they can stay in their homes and inside the limits of the city. Thus, when CIBA suggests to residents that they begin organizing so they can possibly pool their money from the subsidy to collectively purchase the *casa tomada* or another plot of land, residents understand this as, if they comply, CIBA is going to help them purchase the house so they will be able to stay indefinitely. [29]

Sometimes when families from a specific house are evicted, they will end up living in CIBA's headquarters in *Anchorena* for a few weeks or months until they find another place to live or CIBA can place them in another *casa tomada* they are working

[29] In many of my interviews residents often said that they hoped to be able to stay indefinitely in the hotel where they lived.

with. During my field research *Anchorena* remained empty except for one family who lived there permanently, but I heard many accounts of what it was like to live there for an extended period of time from some of the women I interviewed. Usually, during an eviction CIBA offers to lodge those families who have worked most closely with the organization during the months leading up to the eviction. This means that many families may end up living in *Anchorena* for some prolonged period of time. Often crowded conditions make it unbearable for families, who have no place for themselves or to put their things. As Sara's account (below) illustrates, despite literally having a roof over their heads, these families are essentially homeless:

Sara

> In *Anchorena* we slept in the meeting room. Every day there were meetings. The only day there wasn't anything was Thursdays. We shared the room with three other families, because Rodger and his family moved upstairs. So [everyday] we had to pick up the mattresses, put down the mattresses, pick up the mattresses, put down the mattresses. Why? Because every day there were meetings. So you had to move the mattresses because MTL had their soup kitchen, my god, the woman would come and cook and leave the kitchen a complete mess. And there was another family who never cleaned. Well, just imagine, we lived there for two months and we couldn't take it anymore.

CIBA finally placed Sara and her family and others living in *Anchorena* in another *casa tomada* that had some empty rooms. When I interviewed Sara, she was living in a third *casa tomada* that was affiliated with CIBA.[30]

[30]CIBA often put families that were evicted from one *casa tomada* into another one when rooms were available. Some of the women I interviewed had lived in two or three different *casas tomadas* with the help of CIBA.

In the following pages I argue that differing strategies, demands and expectations by both residents and CIBA unwittingly conspire to recreate and reinforce resident's marginalized and subordinate condition. I present evidence of this through an exploration of the nuanced interactions, relationships and strategies that characterize residents of *casas tomadas* and their organizational alliance with CIBA. By focusing on the weekly meetings at CIBA's headquarters, I explore some of the routine interactions between CIBA's leadership and the residents of *casas tomadas.* Later, I examine residents' ties to the State through the city government housing subsidy.

Weekly Meetings

The weekly *asambleas* were my first engagement with the universe of *casas tomadas* and CIBA. These weekly meetings are the most consistent and clear example of the dynamic that exists between CIBA and the residents of the *casas tomadas* affiliated with the organization. Admittedly however, they offer only a glimpse at what is a nuanced and complex reality that plays out at multiple scales and in multiple spaces. I examine these different scales in subsequent chapters.

The room where meetings are held is quite large and can easily fit around sixty people. The walls were a greyish blue and had not been painted for years. Long pieces of wood were set on old benches and chairs and organized around the room for everyone to sit on. At the front of the room were two old desks and four or five old, rickety chairs where Jorge and the other members of the coordinating team sat and officiated the meeting. Weekly meetings always started around 9:30 in the evening. People would start to arrive between 8:30 and 9pm, to see friends from other houses or to talk to Jorge about

a particular issue or concern. Each week the meeting followed a specific format that I saw at other meetings of organizations in Buenos Aires. First, Jorge and the other coordinating members would start by discussing important political events happening in the city or somewhere in Argentina. Jorge would present the situation and discuss its broader social and political significance and then relate it to the struggle for housing. Afterwards, he would always ask if anyone wanted to contribute to the discussion with a comment or a question. Usually everyone remained quiet. During the second part of the meeting, Jorge and the others would discuss each of the houses, explaining where their case was in the courts and if there were things the residents needed to do for their case during that week. Jorge would ask residents from each of the houses to report the situation or he would respond to questions they had. Normally we were there until 11 or 11:30 at night with people coming and going and children crying, running around and playing in the foyer. Sometimes, when tensions were high and there was a problem with a specific house, the meeting would last longer as residents discussed their fears and frustrations, sometimes lashing out at one another or at CIBA (Fig. 4.10).

Figure 4.10: Weekly *Asambleas*

Source: Jonathan Brookings 2009

Most prominent week after week was the routine dynamic of the meetings and interactions that occurred among the residents and executive members. Despite CIBA's insistence on a horizontal hierarchical dynamic among the members, the spatial organization of the meeting, as well as the ways in which most of the resident members participated, suggested otherwise. The following excerpt from my field notes was written after I attended the weekly assembly for the second time.

Field Notes: March 25, 2009

The meeting started very late, around 9:30pm. There were about thirty people in the room, which had been set up with benches and chairs. In the meeting there were more women than men and about four or five children. Everyone was very quiet and let Jorge and Julio, a man from Peru, talk about the march the day before, commemorating the 33rd anniversary of the dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. Jorge talked about how important it was to participate because it was related to the issues of housing and the general situation in which the residents are in now.

Jorge opened the floor and tried to get others to participate. One man from Peru and a woman from Argentina talked about their experiences marching and how not enough people participate. Later, Jorge was trying to explain some of the housing laws to everyone and the way that the system works. It seemed like not everyone understood what Jorge was talking about and many of the people were losing interest, talking among themselves and falling asleep. In fact, I perceived that in many ways there was a disjuncture between the larger message that Jorge and the other main members were trying to communicate, and the residents from the houses who seemed to be there strictly for specific things regarding their house or because they felt they had to be there.

Then they talked about the house on *Independencia.* This morning someone from the district attorney's office went to the house to ask for an inventory of all the furniture. They didn't give it to them, but it seems they tried to evict the people from the hotel. Jorge explained that legally they can't evict anyone without an order from the judge. Jorge was worried that they were going to try to get that order by tomorrow so that they could evict them. He then explained that he was going to ask the judge not to sign anything.

There were about ten people from the house at the meeting. Many of them were women; mothers with children, young women in their early twenties, and some men. Jorge explained to the rest of us that the house had been a hotel, but that it had been condemned. He said that if the district attorney returned to evict them from the house, the women should threaten to jump off the balcony. That way it would be impossible for them to get arrested, because they would not be threatening anyone else with any kind of violence. The people asked, "What if they come tonight to evict us?" Jorge said that he doubted it, that they never evicted people at night.

I kept wondering what would happen to all these people if the district attorney came and threw them out on the street and Jorge and CIBA weren't able to do anything about the situation. At one point Jorge said that if it came to that, that they would make sure that the people received the government subsidies and they would find a place for everyone, but he didn't say much else about it.

Largely based on my initial perceptions in the early moments of my field research, the excerpt captures the different motivations, objectives and discourses of the residents and leaders of CIBA, as well as the general dynamic that I would continue to witness each week at the meetings. Jorge and other executive members or the coordinating committee (the majority men), sat or stood at the "front" of the room behind two or three old desks. The resident members, mostly women from Peru, Paraguay or North Argentina, sat facing them on benches and chairs, listening, chatting with neighbors or trying to control their children. This seating arrangement clearly distinguished the leadership from the resident members and unintentionally reinforced a particular hierarchy and power dynamic between CIBA's leadership and the resident members. At the same time, although Jorge and the other members often spent much of the meeting discussing political issues and explaining the workings of resident's legal situation, it was often Jorge's practical message—what CIBA could do for each of the houses—that received the most attention.

Similarly, one of CIBA's principal objectives each week was to "educate" and empower resident-members by promoting more political awareness and understanding of their struggle for housing and how it was part of a larger class struggle for radical, social change. However, CIBA's objectives to politicize and collectivize the housing struggle of residents of *casas tomadas* were often met with residents' more personal and individualized sets of goals and needs. Residents seemed to go to meetings to be seen and to discuss problems and issues specific to their house. They usually sat silently and patiently, waiting for the moment in the meeting when Jorge and the other executive

members would discuss information relevant to their house. Or resident members might bring up specific problems or conflicts occurring in their house that they wanted CIBA to resolve.

CONTENTIOUS DEMANDS AND CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS

Varied expectations and demands made by resident members also contributed to what were at times contentious and shifting relationship dynamics among the residents and CIBA's executive members. CIBA's objectives as a social movement struggling for radical change, social justice and the right to housing meant that they depended on and expected resident members to participate politically and collectively in the struggle for housing. Resident members did often participate, but were often motivated by much more immediate, practical and individual needs. Residents' presence and participation often seemed instigated by their interest in securing CIBA's support and help in "resolving" their immediate housing situation. In the following excerpts from my field notes I illustrate how, during weekly meetings at CIBA, these nuanced and complex relationships were unwittingly reproduced, despite resident and executive members' knowledge or intentions.

Field Note: April 15, 2009 – CIBA meeting

There are very few people tonight, even fewer than on other occasions when I have been here. As usual there are more women than men. The meeting started around 9 o'clock and more people started arriving a little later. Most of them were women. Jorge asked everyone to move up to the front, a few people did, but three women tried to stay where they were, exclaiming, *"Estamos aquí para escuchar compañero"* (We are here to listen, comrade). When Jorge moved away, two of the women moved up one row, but stayed in the back.

Arte, one of the main members gave a short speech about the importance of participating in the protests. He said that things are only going to get worse. That the government is developing a project that would build a corridor between Boca and Puerto Madero for tourists and that this would be terrible for many people because there are plenty of houses in that area that would be evicted. *"Hay que parar esta ola de desalojos"* (We have to stop this wave of evictions).

Later Jorge talked about an initiative they have started: a collective savings plan *(el círculo de ahorro)*. This is a long-term project in which people would save money collectively that would eventually go to a plot of land where each family could build a home. Someone asked a question about if they could still put money in if they are kicked out of their house and no longer have formal ties with CIBA, and Jorge said of course. A lot of people started to ask questions.

One woman said that the criteria should have to do with who needs a house, because, she said, *"realmente nosotros necesitamos un techo"* (we really need a roof over our heads). Jorge said, "We are talking about something that is going to take years". Carla, a young, pretty Peruvian woman asked if it was possible to do it in a faster amount of time if people had the money to put down. Jorge said that it was still going to take years. The idea is that, if they arrive with half of the money, it will be easier for them to propose that the government put the other half (under the Ley 341). I keep thinking about the lack of stability and how this affects the daily lives of the people. How can people think about two or three years ahead, if they are worried that next month they might be homeless?

This excerpt illustrates not only the different motivations of the residents and CIBA, but also the ways in which temporal conditions play a role in how actors are able to organize for future goals. At the same time, it highlights how the inability to secure immediate needs and concerns influence the ways in which residents envision future goals and objectives. Residents seemed more concerned with finding ways to get what

they needed for the immediate future instead of collectively organizing to work towards a common goal. As I state in the field note, this makes sense given the conditions under which many of these residents are living as they await eviction.

The following excerpt also highlights how residents try to collectively organize, often to satisfy CIBA's demands of working toward a common goal. When these efforts are thwarted, this creates a particular dynamic that leads to further anxiety among the residents with respect to their perceived dependence on CIBA.

Field Notes: April 29, 2009

A tall Argentine man gave a recap about last weeks' meeting in *Gardel*. He said that they had talked about putting security at the door [to control who comes in and out of the building]. He said he had talked with others, and while some people were in favor, others were against it. Jorge asked if they had talked about it with other people on the other floors, and a woman repeated what we had heard many times at the meeting on Friday, that when they went to talk to the people on the other floors they were insulted and treated badly.

Jorge explained that the house probably had a few more months and that there were further steps that could be taken, but CIBA could not do anything if the house was not willing to organize and do something themselves. He said that it was possible to appeal, but that they wouldn't do it, if the house wasn't organized and willing to fight this together. Jorge said that it really bothered him those people who said that they wanted to do something, but that they weren't going to do anything because no one else was. He said that any house needs leaders and that there needed to be people who were willing to talk to their neighbors and do something.

Two people from the house tried to defend themselves saying that they can't do anything… They said they had talked to people in the house about the issue of security and that a Paraguayan man had mentioned organizing a volunteer guard duty. But then

someone said they didn't just want the Paraguayan's to organize and do it, while the Peruvians and the Argentinians aren't going to do anything.

The weekly meetings at CIBA offer a space from which to analyze the multiple and often conflicting objectives, goals, demands and expectations of the different actors involved in the struggle for housing in Buenos Aires. On the one hand, CIBA discusses the importance of participating in the movement, on the other, residents attempt to define and control their participation and presence through where they sit and how they participate in weekly meetings. These mutually inclusive but contentious strategies and expectations of CIBA's resident members and the broader political objectives of its leadership illustrate the heterogeneous and complex character of social organizations (Nicholls, 2009). They also offer a glimpse at how actors unwittingly reproduce relationships and dynamics of power and subordination, even as they attempt to challenge and resist hegemonic institutions and promote social justice and collective organization.

Furthermore, the exchange between Jorge and residents concerning the *círculo de ahorro*[31] offers insight into CIBA's goals as a social movement and residents' more personal and immediate needs and demands. These different projects and goals are not necessarily exclusive or opposing, but nevertheless illustrate the difficulties of long-term organizing when immediate needs are not met or threatened. The *círculo de ahorro* assumes a level of collective organization and ability to plan and seems to disregard the

[31] The *círculo de ahorro* was an endeavor proposed by CIBA as an alternative to the cooperatives that have been designed to work within the legal framework of the Ley 341, which matches funds and low interest loans to housing cooperatives. During 2009, Mauricio Macri, the head of the city government, had suspended funding for Ley 341. (See Chapter II)

daily situation of the residents living in *casas tomadas.* At the same time, it offers residents the opportunity to think beyond the immediate, take advantage of the fact that currently they are not paying rent and offers a possibility to remain in the city, if they are able to purchase something collectively inside the city limits. Not surprisingly, the *círculo de ahorro* was later abandoned, although at the time, the few families that were interested and willing to invest in it, all lived in relatively stable housing situations and were not in a position of constant threat of eviction.

The divisions and distrust that residents experienced inside the houses also seep into residents' ability to organize and their relationship with CIBA. Often, when divisions inside the houses were particularly problematic, the residents closest to CIBA would ask Jorge to have a meeting inside a house. In these meetings resident's frustrations with each other and with CIBA's presence created a tension that was palpable. At the same time, resident's inability and resistance to work together frustrated CIBA's objectives of empowering residents of *casas tomadas* through collective organization. A commonly heard complaint was, "Why should we try to do anything, if the others aren't going to?" The constant tension between individual and immediate needs and objectives and collective and longer-term strategies, characterized the struggles and networks of relationships and interactions inside each of the *casas tomadas,* and in residents' participation and expectations of CIBA.

THE CITY GOVERNMENT AND THE SUBSIDY

In this section, I discuss the role of the State through the AFSC program, examining the significance of the subsidy for residents as they wait for eviction and

struggle to remain inside the city. Later I analyze CIBA's use of the subsidy as a tool for negotiating with the State, and how the subsidy reinforces residents' on-going subordination as recipients of state-sponsored programs.

Since 2000, the city government has attempted to deal with the issue of evictions and the housing crisis using some "quick-fix" solutions through programs that address the immediate threat of eviction on a temporary and superficial basis. The *Programa de Atención para Familias en Situación de Calle* [32](AFSC), or 'the subsidy', is a program sponsored by the city government that offers a monthly quota of $1300 pesos ($300 US) to families evicted from their home. On the day of eviction families must go to the Welfare Office (*Desarrollo Social)* to receive the first quota. Afterwards, they can receive another $1300 pesos each month for up to ten months.[33] In order to be eligible, families must be present in the house during the day of eviction. Afterwards, they must follow a series of requirements and paperwork to prove that they are paying rent in a hotel, boarding house, or apartment in order to continue to receive the subsidy. These procedures and requirements involve a substantial amount of time, traveling, money and

[32] Program for Families at Risk of Homelessness

[33] The *Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle (AFSC)* program, was introduced in 2002 in response to growing criticism by various social organizations regarding a similar program, *Atención a Casos de Emergencia Individual y Familiar (ACEIF). ACEIF* had helped individuals and families evicted from their home by housing them in hotels subsidized by the city government. However, residents of the hotels were constantly denouncing the government for housing them in buildings that did not meet even the most minimal standards for safety and hygiene. Entire families lived in small rooms and other makeshift spaces, often without windows or ventilation. At the same time, what had originally been envisioned as a temporary housing solution had become increasingly permanent. The government had essentially put itself in a difficult position: *ACEIF* was supposed to help families avoid eviction by temporarily housing them in hotels. However, without any alternative housing options, families remained in these government subsidized hotels year after year. With the AFSC program, the government was no longer responsible for the conditions under which families lived.

waiting, as well as the saving and organizing of documents and receipts. Often, even when families are able to go to the welfare office and present the proper papers, they are told that they must return another day because of some problem or error (Auyero, 2012). In his book, *Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina* (2012), Auyero suggests these types of procedures and processes that take place in government offices create a dynamic in which the poor are repeatedly subordinated by the state through often-commonplace practices presented in the form of state assistance. Similarly, Walter Nicholls has noted, "when diverse people interact in institutional settings, the prevailing rules governing social interactions often reinforce hierarchies rather than break them down (Nicholls, 2009: 81). What this essentially means is that residents of *casas tomadas* become increasingly entwined in these subordinate relationships with CIBA and the State, even as they attempt to gain some benefit from the subsidy.

CIBA, however, is also bound to the subsidy, using it to organize residents and to negotiate with the city government as a way to help them receive some profit even as they are evicted from their homes. Thus, despite CIBA's attempts at empowering residents, the subsidy as a tool of negotiation and organization also serves to reinforce resident's dependence and subordination, even before they are evicted. As a result, it also limits CIBA's more radical objectives and ties them to the State. As Jorge explained,

> It isn't that past governments were good, but that this one is even worse. It is a government with a housing policy of evicting the poor from the city. It is this idea of an elitist city, totally liberal, a city for tourists, for real estate investments… and the policies the city government has implemented reflect this

ideology. From this point of view it is very difficult to do anything, to finance people, to buy a house, to advance with the cooperative, it's very difficult. The only things we can do are collect the subsidy and sometimes negotiate it.

Despite their objectives of collectively organizing residents and struggling for rights to housing and to the city, CIBA has few options available that allow the organization to aid residents in any profound or transformative way. Although residents can receive the subsidy without CIBA, the bureaucratic hoops make it difficult and they often feel increasingly bound to the organization because of its knowledge and ability to negotiate directly with the city. As a result, its importance in residents' and CIBA's decision-making process and strategies becomes increasingly significant throughout the eviction process. Thus, the subsidy and the act of waiting for eviction create particular relationships between the residents, CIBA and the State that are characterized by dependence, mistrust, negotiation and subordination. Like Nicholls' claim above, these relationships are manifested in the routine encounters and activities that CIBA organizes that collectively involve the residents, like in the protest I discuss below:

Field Notes: June 18, 2009

Today there was a large protest. All week long members from CIBA had been going to the houses to make sure people would participate. In the end there were about 150 people including many children. I arrived at the *Obelisco* about 1 o'clock and started talking to a woman from Peru who currently lives in a hotel because she was evicted from a boarding house. She lives with her husband and their two children. She said that the eviction was violent: the police came and banged on all the doors and kicked everyone out. She considers herself lucky, because she had already gone to work, and her husband was also about to go to work and lock the kids in the bedroom until she got

back. Fortunately he hadn't left yet so he was able to protect their children a bit more. Still, she claims that her little boy is still traumatized and that he thinks that all police are bad because of what they did to him and his family.

[The march lasted] from around 2 o'clock until 4:30 and then we all went back to CIBA. Fernando and Julio (two main members of CIBA) took out their lists to write down everyone who had come to the march.[34] It was awful to see how everyone crowded around them to make sure that their names were written down. One of the things that Jorge said this past week was that if the people didn't participate, CIBA was not going to help them get the subsidy.

On the one hand I completely understand, CIBA does a lot for the people living in the houses. In fact most people refuse to pay the monthly quota of $20 pesos, which is less than $5 dollars and in general very little, even here in Buenos Aires. On the other hand, the subsidy becomes the carrot in front of the stick. In an interview, one resident said to me that many people stay in the houses waiting to receive the subsidy. I wonder how things would play out if there were no subsidy to receive… Last night at CIBA one of the women from the house on *Zelaya* said that the rest of the people in the house were *unos sin verguenzas* (just taking advantage) and the only thing they were waiting for was for the house to be evicted so that they could receive the subsidy and get on with their lives.

These events highlight the ways in which the subsidy, although perhaps used to motivate residents to organize around a common goal and a long term objective only destabilizes and divides residents in their relationships with CIBA and with each other. I talked to Jorge about the role that the subsidy played in the relationships and perceived prospects of the residents of the houses. He told me about another house they had worked with a couple of years earlier. CIBA was able to reach an agreement with the

[34] Recording the names of participants after each march was not a general practice of CIBA.

owner of the house, the city government, and the residents, which would allow each family to pay the full amount of the subsidy ($4500 pesos/each) toward remaining in the house for one more year. It was a great deal and much cheaper than paying normal rent in a hotel. But as they were coming upon the date of eviction, one man stated that he didn't believe this was the situation and claimed that CIBA was going to keep all the money. The deal finally fell through and the families were evicted a few weeks later.

I am not suggesting that CIBA is not an important or an effective organization. CIBA's lawyers represent residents in court, often presenting documents that prolong the case and offer residents more time to look for another place to live. Jorge and other member's knowledge of the system and laws also helps residents understand the few options available to them and how to the maneuver within the system. Additionally, CIBA usually tries to use the subsidy to negotiate with the government, requesting the immediate and full amount for residents of *casas tomadas*. In exchange, CIBA promises a peaceful and quick eviction. If the government does not agree to some or all of their demands, CIBA threatens to resist eviction. In one interview, Jorge explained,

> In the best cases when the city pays out the entire amount to the residents—it is what we have always fought for, not because we like it, but because there is nothing else—families have some freedom to choose what they do with the money, not like when they get a certain amount per month, which is just like a noose around the neck.

However, despite these and other efforts, CIBA's strategies and practices remain tied to the broader policies and services the city government provides and the precarious reality

of their resident members, limiting their ability to effectively and collectively organize. Thus, although CIBA remains committed to social change, its more practical strategies of negotiating the subsidy often only undermine their broader social struggle and objectives. For, even when residents are able to receive the subsidy in one lump sum or for a prolonged period of time, they will still ultimately use it to pay rent for a room in a hotel. In other words, although the subsidy offers some compensation and aid to residents for a period of up to ten months, it also recreates the vulnerability of residents' current housing situation by keeping families inside the informal regime of hotels and boarding houses. Or, as Jorge said to me, "[it] ends up operating to help expel [people] from the city."[35]

At the same time, in most cases and despite CIBA's efforts at negotiating a collective solution to eviction, the subsidy is an example of the individual and solitary divisions of eviction from one's home. The state administers the subsidy to individual families. As a result, when residents view the subsidy as a strategy to deal with eviction, they lose any impetus to organize collectively. The contentious dynamic inside *casas tomadas,* mistrust among the residents and uncertainty about the future also severely hinder any possibility of organizing and investing funds in a collective solution.

The subsidy offers some financial aid to poor families struggling to pay the high cost of rent in informal hotels and boarding houses inside and outside of the city. However, as Auyero (2012) discusses in his work, once residents are evicted and eligible to receive the subsidy, they are further subordinated by the State through bureaucratic

[35] Increasingly more families are moving outside the city limits because of the difficulties for the poor to find a place to live inside the city.

practices that create more confusion, frustration and exhaustion as residents lose time and money traveling and waiting to receive their benefits each month. Despite their objectives, CIBA's use of the subsidy as a tool to negotiate with the State, and to rally and organize residents, only heightens the subsidy's impact on resident's relationships, strategies and decisions. Furthermore, it reinforces the control the State has over the poor and their struggle to stay in the city.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have introduced some of the main themes of my research through further introduction of the main actors, their objectives and relationships. As I have attempted to show, relationships of power, negotiation and dependence characterize what is a precarious reality marred by confusion, distrust and urgency. Residents from *casas tomadas* engage in relationships and develop strategies to try to access certain benefits that will allow them some sort of solution or benefit once they are evicted. CIBA, as a social organization fighting for housing rights for the poor and the right to the city, is constantly engaging in strategies that both attempt to address the immediate needs and struggles of the residents and the long term housing needs of the poor in Buenos Aires. This all happens within the context of a city government that offers few programs and limited housing opportunities for the poor to remain inside the city limits.

Residents' uncertain future and their daily struggle to create a safe space for their family, to ensure access to basic resources and negotiate spaces with other residents, all contribute to a very immediate and urgent reality. By attending weekly meetings, participating in protests and showing interest in CIBA's initiatives, residents engage in

strategies that very often mirror CIBA's long-term and collective goals, but that are representative of resident's short term and individual objectives and demands.

In this sense, residents are not passive players in these relationships, but instead suggest that residents engage in strategies in which they appear to subordinate themselves−to differing degrees−in order to ensure they maintain CIBA's support and aid in the form of the subsidy and other types of assistance. CIBA conversely, and often unwittingly, also contributes to relationships of power and subordination, through practices that are often designed to achieve just the opposite. None of these acts or practices offers a complete or consistent picture of the conditions in the struggle for housing. Instead, as I have repeatedly argued, these are nuanced and complex relationships that incorporate multiple strategies, interpretations and demands.

CHAPTER V

The Gendered Struggle for Home

Homes are contexts in which the self is accounted for in many concrete ways and the boundaries and curtains of the self can be drawn. Katherine Platt

[Home] is the place where you don't really have to defend yourself… And unfortunately not everyone has this refuge. Paul Auster

INTRODUCTION

The women included in this study had originally traveled alone from Peru to Buenos Aires to establish themselves and were then followed by other family members. Some of the women had spent years in Buenos Aires before their family arrived. Reunited with loved ones, migrant women all of a sudden have a much harder time finding a place to live in the city, forcing many to move into *casas tomadas* or to leave the city and give up access to resources, networks and other forms of social capital they were able to develop over time.

Although residents come from many different regions and countries, Peruvian women are a pervasive and constant presence both inside the houses and in meetings and protests. Additionally, in contrast to most Peruvian men, Peruvian women's participation in the struggle for housing and the right to the city is prominent and meaningful. Women are clearly at the center of the struggle for housing, both in terms of the internal dynamic inside the houses and as public figures in the political struggle for the right to housing and to the city. In many cases, the women I interviewed were also the main breadwinners

of the family, either because they were single parents or because their husbands were unemployed or underemployed day laborers.

Presenting Peruvian women's accounts of their experiences in Buenos Aires at different stages of the migration process, I examine how women's gendered identities and roles influence and embody their experiences of migration, home and their struggle to remain in the city (Fenster, 2005; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Tovi Fenster, in her article, *The Right to the Gendered City* (2005), describes how women's narratives show that "even in 'private' their right to use [the city] is denied" (220). Using this gendered approach, she argues that a discussion around the right to the city in terms of its use and one's right to participate in decision-making must begin at the "home-scale" (220).

Scholarship by critical feminist geographers has long discussed the gendered nature of space and place (McDowell, 1999; Mallet, 2004; Massey 1994, 2005; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Traditionally viewed as the woman's domain, imaginations of home continue to be constructed around assumptions of the roles and responsibilities of women as mothers and caretakers (Massey, 1994). Women continue to be responsible for creating safe and stable spaces for their family members through such practices as preparing meals, cleaning and nurturing family members, especially young children and older relatives. As a result, the significance of house and home and women's identity are undeniably bound together and reproduced through social relationships and institutional practices and norms (Massey, 1994; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Marston, 2004). As Massey (1994) explains,

> the construction of home as a woman's place has, moreover, carried through into those views of place itself as a source of stability, reliability and authenticity. Such views of place, which reverberate with nostalgia for something lost, are coded female. Home is where the heart is and where the woman is also….In this way of looking at the world, the identities of 'women' and of the 'home-place' are intimately tied up with each other… (180).

These roles and responsibilities are bound by social relationships and structural expectations inside and outside of our home-spaces. A look into the meanings of spaces and places and how they are interconnected and bound, offers further understanding of the ways that they both constrain and empower individuals differently, and easily underscores the importance of space and place on identity and experience.

Through an examination of Peruvian women's experiences of migration and their struggle to make a place for themselves and their family in Buenos Aires, this chapter focuses on women's livelihood practices and strategies, as well as the narratives they employ to confront and cope with their housing situation. The gendered character of informal housing is discussed through an analysis of how migrant women, in their role as mothers and caretakers, assume the burdens of living in a *casa tomada* and waiting for eviction in Buenos Aires. I also explore the different stages of migration, focusing on the reasons women originally migrate, their initial experiences living and working in Buenos Aires, the adjustments and difficulties when other family members join them and the challenges of living in a *casa tomada* awaiting eviction.

For many Peruvian immigrants, Buenos Aires offers economic opportunities and a relatively higher quality of life than in their places of origin. The women I interviewed discussed their ability to access important resources and services like free education,

healthcare and other social benefits that are unavailable or financially difficult to attain in their place of origin. Additionally, they explained that although they or their family owned a house back in Peru, they were unable to find work or pay to go to the University.

In Buenos Aires, often on their own or living with friends and family, Peruvian women were able to find decent employment and also access other opportunities. At the same time, despite having high levels of education (Cerrutti, 2005), Peruvian migrant women are usually bound to domestic service (Escriva, 2000; Paerregaard, 2007; Rocios, 2008), or they might work in other areas of the service industry, like in the small Chinese-owned supermarkets or Peruvian restaurants scattered around Buenos Aires.

When Peruvian migrant women first move to Buenos Aires they usually see it as a temporary solution, an opportunity to earn money in one location which will allow them to "build" in another. In this context, single Peruvian migrant women are able to find employment and rent a room in a hotel with relative ease. However, if they decide to remain in the city, perhaps marrying or having children or bringing them from Peru, they are suddenly barred from finding a place to live. In other words, women in their role as mothers and partners are denied access to dwelling and from building a new life in Buenos Aires. Women living in *casas tomadas* are constrained from creating home spaces through routine practices of home-making and care-taking. At the same time, Peruvian migrant women struggle daily to create some sense of home for their families and themselves despite the social and spatial conditions in which they find themselves. In this chapter I will demonstrate how women are denied access to housing through and as a result of their identities as mothers and caretakers. In this context, I explore how

Peruvian women migrants living in *casas tomadas* confront and give meaning to their precarious and volatile housing situation and how it affects notions of identity and self-worth. The following quote is an example of not only Peruvian women's experiences of migration, but also the narratives they employ to tell their stories.

Gloria

> I had the opportunity to come to Buenos Aires because my sister was here. I came because I couldn't support my kids. In Peru I didn't work. I just helped my mother who had a flower stand. I'd go twice a week to the city and bring flowers back. Why? Because that way my mother had more support and she could buy food with the money for the house, and my children had something to eat. Sometimes their father would help me out and sometimes he wouldn't and I got fed up. I don't like to be humiliated. So the opportunity arose and I decided to come here. First though, I had to work out who was going to take care of my kids because I had a little boy and a girl. It was really hard to leave them when my daughter was only six years old and my boy was only one. I left my son with my mother and my daughter with my sister in law, who has always helped me out, even now. I was really young. I was only 21 years old and I was a mother of two kids! They are the reason I came to Buenos Aires.

STARTING A NEW LIFE

The everyday life experiences of living in a *casa tomada* in Buenos Aires are part of a much larger odyssey that begins before migrant residents find themselves waiting for eviction, before they arrive to Buenos Aires, or even before they climb on a bus bound for Argentina. Like Gloria at the beginning of this chapter, many women I interviewed discussed their choices to migrate and to leave their children in order to be able to help support them and the rest of their family. Almost all of the women discussed their

inability to support either themselves or their children in Peru and their frustration at not being able to financially contribute to their family's needs before migrating. Others discussed escaping situations of domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and financial uncertainty. Whatever the reason, the women whom I interviewed had originally migrated to Buenos Aires to work in domestic service only temporarily. They had originally planned to stay and work for a few months or years to save money and send it back to Peru, eventually returning to their place of origin (Escriva, 2000; Paerregard, 2007).[36] Sonia, who is married to an Argentine with whom she has two children, and who migrated from Peru to Buenos Aires in the mid-nineties explained, "I wanted to help my parents. I wanted them to have a nice bedroom, a nice living room, a good bathroom and kitchen. I had some ideas about Argentina and so I was curious and I wanted to help my parents out. I thought I'd stay for two or three years; work, make money and leave." Sonia was able to help her parents financially, but she never returned to live in Peru.

When Peruvian women first move to Buenos Aires they often rent a room alone or with friends in a family hotel or boarding house. The women who are domestic workers may live in their employer's homes during the week and either stay with friends or rent a room in a hotel for when they are off on the weekends. Informal housing inside the city in the form of family hotels and boarding houses offer cheap and temporary alternatives to women who need a room for the weekend or a home from where they can move around the city to different cleaning jobs where they are paid by the hour.

[36] In their research, Escriva (2000) and Paerregard (2007) both highlight how Peruvian migrant women migrate with the intention of returning to Peru after two or three years.

When Gloria first arrived to Buenos Aires she went to live in the *provincia*[37] outside the city, in a house of a friend. "She let me stay because my sister lived there. But I arrived on a Saturday and my sister left on that Tuesday for Peru because she missed her daughter." Gloria didn't like to live with the woman, so she moved to the city. Gloria had replaced her sister as a live-in maid, so she lived and slept in the home of her employer during the week and on the weekends "with my friend we would sleep on the train, or in the plaza Retiro, where the clock is".[38] Later she and a friend rented a room in Constitución[39] on the weekends. "That is when I started to have my own things. I would arrive on Saturday and Sunday, but during the week no one touched my stuff. I would shut the door with a lock and chain. There we paid $200 or $250 pesos a month each." Gloria continued to move around, renting a room by herself in a hotel to which she explained, "I had my own room then, I really liked living alone." Later she moved to a boarding house in the same neighborhood where she shared a room with a friend. She sums up her experience by saying, "When I arrived here alone I had some freedom, because I wasn't tied to anything. There was a time when things were difficult and I couldn't send money, but I always tried to be present for both my kids. What I couldn't have I want my kids to have…that was my reason for leaving Peru."

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[37] *La Provincia* is commonly used by city residents to refer to the neighborhoods and communities located outside the city center in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area.

[38] It was common for women who worked as live-in maids to leave their employers house one weekend night a week. Many women would either spend the night with friends or family. This allowed workers to have a degree of independence, go out with friends and leave the confines of their job for a period of 36 hours a week.

[39] A working class neighborhood in Buenos Aires.

When I conducted my field research Gloria lived in a *casa tomada* in the neighborhood of Abasto with her son who had come from Peru to live with her. The building where she lived was originally an informal hotel. "When I moved in everything was very clean, everything shined. There were only a couple of students, so I rented this room and lived here with my son." Later, the building changed hands and the new owner stopped paying the manager, so he left. The owner accrued many fines and the building was so deteriorated that he was prohibited by the city from renting out the rooms, a directive which the owner ignored at first. "Now they don't charge us, because if the owner charges us he could be fined." When I asked Gloria why she continued to live in a *casa tomada*, she replied,

> I live here because it is close to my job and to my son's school. I work on Sanchez Bustamante and my son's school is three blocks away. Since he is young I want [to be around] to control him and his friends more. [Also] because it is cheaper for me and because in other places they told me they wouldn't rent to Peruvians and the possibilities are even more remote if you have kids. The kids use more electricity, more gas. It doesn't matter if they are younger or older, they don't want them. They only want single people. Single.

Gloria and her son also suffer discrimination because they are Peruvian. She described a typical encounter with a hotel manager when one is looking for a place to live:

> [The hotels] put a sign in the window that says, Room for Rent. You go and ask and they say, "For how many people"? Then they ask, "do you work or are you around all day?" We work. And finally, "What are you? Peruvian? Bolivian?" Peruvian. "Oh no, then no. We don't want Peruvians. The Peruvians are wild, they drink too much and they don't pay."

As in Gloria's account, Peruvians in particular are considered to be problematic, rowdy and dishonest, a stereotype that was repeated to me by the Peruvians themselves. At the same time, Peruvian women were often described as being particularly resourceful and independent. In general, Peruvians have a higher level of education than other migrant groups and Argentines in similar living and employment situations (Cerrutti, 2005). Culturally, Peruvian women can also be more determined and outspoken than their Bolivian and Paraguayan counterparts. In one instance a Bolivian woman said to me, "I learned how to speak up from the Peruvian women. Now I speak my mind and I don't back down."

The informal character of hotels and boarding houses, the tight quarters and the fact that rent increases or eviction can happen at any time, make them highly unstable and ephemeral spaces, particularly for migrants trying to make a space for themselves and their family in the city. Still, for many Peruvian women, their initial experiences in Buenos Aires have been positive. They have been successful in finding work and were able to earn enough money to support themselves in the city and to send back to their families in Peru in the form of remittances.

The women I interviewed discussed their early experiences through a narrative that highlighted their pride in making enough money to provide for their family back in Peru and their ability to construct new lives and access opportunities unavailable to them before they migrated. Natalia, who arrived with her sister's two boys whom she had taken care of for years since her sister had moved to Buenos Aires, explained:

Natalia

> What I have, what I can buy for myself comes from the fact that I work. I allow myself… I mean, I am proud of my work, and what I have, and to be doing the things I am doing in the short time I have been here. I have a job, I know I can get a job here. If I go back to Peru, I will be in my country, in my house, but I can't achieve what I can here, because there I can't work. That is why I came here. With what I earn here I could live really well in Peru. Here you can work, but it is difficult. Everything costs more (here), but there are jobs. I know that tomorrow I can get a job, so I don't have to think twice about buying something because I know I'm going to have money.

Like Natalia (and Gloria earlier on in this chapter), many women I interviewed described their initial sense of freedom and pride during their first few months and years in Buenos Aires, which came from their ability to financially provide for themselves and their family, as well as achieve financial and social autonomy and independence in the city. Like Gloria, many of the women told stories of living in hotels with friends, creating new lives, developing relationships and having money—things they did not experience or possess in the same way in Peru. For many it was the first time they were able to make decisions regarding their personal lives. Although in my interviews the women discussed the difficulties and challenges of living and working in Argentina, they also described how, after a long work week they would go dancing on the weekends, stay out with friends, or simply enjoy the day off at a park with friends or a boyfriend. Drawing from the experiences of the women I interviewed, immigration from Peru to Buenos Aires has been beneficial, not only monetarily, but also in terms of personal and individual development. The Peruvian women I interviewed from all ages talked about

creating a space and lifestyle in which they felt hopeful and able to accomplish certain goals. Often making money and living alone for the first time, the women described a sense of freedom and opportunities not available to them in the place of origin. At the same time, they had the economic means to provide for their families back home and had access to humble living spaces that allowed them a certain freedom and autonomy they had not felt before. However, this narrative changes when women have children and attempt to "settle down" inside the city. All of a sudden, women's ability to find a place to live and to offer stability to their family, be it economic or spatial, is challenged through their role as mothers and caretakers. At this point, women's narratives are overshadowed by their struggle to find housing in the city and to remain close to jobs and resources, and take care of their family's basic daily needs and demands.

NO CHILDREN ALLOWED

Rocio arrived from Peru in Buenos Aires in 2005. She came to the city for work because she and her husband were having a hard time making ends meet in Peru. Rocio had a sister already living in Buenos Aires, who told her she would be able to earn more money in Argentina. At first she worked as a live-in maid in a big house in San Isidro.[40] Then she lived in a hotel in Abasto with her sister. Later, when her son and husband were going to arrive she had to find another place to live, but was having a difficult time. Then one day she was walking down the street and a neighbor pointed to a man and said, "Go ask that man, he has a hotel around the corner". Rocio was able to rent a room for herself, her husband and her son. She said the room was in a terrible condition and that

[40] San Isidro is a rich neighborhood outside of Buenos Aires.

the manager was always complaining about everything, but she took it and stayed because it was the only thing available.

A few months later, when their two daughters and granddaughter were going to arrive they had to move again. They found another room in a large apartment building on the main intersection of Corrientes and Pueyrredón.[41] When they moved in they had to walk up 13 flights of stairs because there was no elevator. The room was big but there was no water except on the first floor. Dealers sold drugs on the sixth floor. Rocio and her husband Rodger were paying $300 pesos a month to rent the room. Later, their neighbors explained that they had bought their rooms for just $600 pesos. A few weeks later Rocio and Rodger found out they and the other families would soon be evicted from the building.

Like Rocio and Eva, who had originally arrived alone and been successful in finding a job and making a place for themselves in Buenos Aires, the other women I interviewed told stories of going from hotel to hotel looking for a room where they could receive their family members, and repeatedly being denied access once they said they had children. Other women who had followed family members to Buenos Aires described their shock and embarrassment when they saw and learned about the conditions in which they would be living. These narratives highlight a common situation experienced by immigrants around the globe. Migrant labor is deemed desirable and beneficial until workers begin to stay in the country. Stated differently, migrant workers are an accepted source of labor, as long as they remain temporary and invisible. As single women,

[41] The house was always referred to as *Pueyrredón*.

Peruvian migrant women live in temporary lodgings in informal hotels and boarding houses and remain invisible as domestic servants and cleaners inside homes and offices.

STAYING IN THE CITY

Peruvian migrant women move from a relatively newfound empowerment and independence into a new experience of vulnerability and desperation because of their inability to find and provide basic shelter for themselves and their families. They are suddenly denied access to housing and to the city *because of* their identity as mothers and as caretakers. Sonia, a Peruvian woman who migrated to Argentina alone in 1995 and later married an Argentine and had two children with him explained, "I looked a lot so that we could stay in the city and not move to Lomas de Zamora[42]. My son would say to me, 'Oh mom! Just give me away because I am the problem, it's my fault that no one wants to rent you an apartment'"(Sonia).

For those families who are repeatedly denied a room by hotel managers and owners once they reveal that they have children, access to *casas tomadas* through the purchase, renting or occupying of a room is often a last ditch effort to remain inside Buenos Aires. For women who have young children and who have lived and worked inside Buenos Aires, moving outside the city severely limits opportunities and quality of life. As I discuss below, transportation costs and travel times, security and the quality of resources and services in the *provincia,* keep families in the city, despite the poor housing opportunities available to them. For many of the people I interviewed, moving outside

[42] Lomas de Zamora is a neighborhood immediately outside of the city limits of Buenos Aires.

the city was simply not a viable option. Sara talks about the desperation she felt when it seemed like she and her family would have to leave the city in order to find a place to live.

Sara

> Finally, we were going to go to move outside the city to the *provincia*. I kept saying, "*no, no, no la provincia*!" I think we were going to go to Merlo.[43] We had found a house there for $300 pesos. But when we worked out how much money we would be spending on transportation, we said, "it is better that we rent a room in the city for $600 pesos/month, because it would have been too expensive for the whole family to commute! We didn't have enough money![44]

Sara's account highlights the desperation felt by families as they try to maneuver through an often immediate and urgent situation with few, if any real formal housing options. There is a shift from the relative independence and economic security that single women have achieved, to a new condition of instability, dependence and uncertainty about how they will be able to provide for their family, remain in the city and access urban resources and services. Purchasing or finding a bedroom in a *casa tomada,* allows residents to remain in Buenos Aires, which in turn offers them opportunities unavailable in the province. Sonia, who lives in Lomas de Zamora on the weekend and who stays in Abasto in a *casa tomada* with her children during the week explained,

> The situation in the province is very different than in the city. In the city you have a lot more opportunities. The schools are a bit better; they don't go on

[43] Merlo is a neighborhood in the Metropolitan Area approximately 30 miles outside the urban area of Buenos Aires.

[44] In August of 2009, the federal government raised the minimum wage to $1440 pesos/month. This amount was reserved primarily for public servants and employees of state run companies. In general, domestic workers earned between $1200- $1300 pesos a month.

strike as much. In the province they even cancel school when it rains. Well, at least that's what happens where I live.

Sonia lived in Buenos Aires in a *casa tomada* for nine years until she and her family were evicted two years ago and moved to the province, immediately outside the city limits. With the help of CIBA, she was able to receive a room in *Gardel*, where she stays during the week so that her children can go to school in the city and she can work and take advantage of some of the neighborhood resources available to her and her children. Her husband stays in Loma de Zamora where he works in La Salada, the largest informal market in Latin America.

Sonia

There is also a lot less security [in the province]. Here I can walk around, but in Zamora I can't. A lot of things happen, robberies, gunshots, kids smoking… For me the city is safer. Even living in *Gardel*, I feel safer here than in the province where I live. I feel comfortable here, because ... my children are with me. Also because the hospital is close, the shopping is close, they can go outside in the pedestrian street and play and run and it isn't dangerous.

Sonia had also returned to the city so that her children could go to school and be closer to some of the many low cost or free urban resources available to them in Abasto. Sonia explained, "In Abasto I have a place where my kids go to sculpt, a workshop for games, gymnastics, my daughter goes to the library, I go to workshops for women on nutrition and other things. I feel good! I am finishing a knitting class, where I go, they teach you to knit while the kids play and learn things."

In Abasto there are many cultural centers that cater to the families living in and around the neighborhood. These include immigrant families living in *casas tomadas* and informal hotels. Part of a movement to keep the Abasto neighborhood from further gentrifying, these cultural centers are spaces that promote culture and class diversity, offering a range of classes from video games for children, Peruvian dances, *caporeira*, community acting classes in the tradition of Boal's theater for the oppressed, after-school programs and educational courses and workshops for men and women. These centers are another example of the many community resources available to residents in the city.

Sonia is also able to save time and money by having a room in the city. I asked her what a typical day was like when she had to travel to the city from her home in Lomas de Zamora.

Sonia: In tickets I spend about $7 pesos a day. It's about $210 pesos a month. Because I have to bring my two kids here, I pay $1.75 pesos for the train. Afterwards, I drop my son off at school and then take the other one to day care. I buy another ticket for myself, and then if I go back to Zamora I arrive around 11 am, the whole morning is gone. Then the oldest one goes back home by himself, but I have to pick up the younger one at 5 o'clock, so I have to leave my house at 3:30.

Solange: So how many hours do you spend traveling?

Sonia: On a day like that? I spend about five or six hours traveling and waiting for the bus. In the morning I leave my house at ten to seven. I take the bus at 7:20, I have to be at the school at 8, I drop my son off and then I take another bus to my daughter's daycare and then I take the bus home again at 9:30 and

> when I arrive home it is 10:30 or 11. Then I go to pick my kids up in the afternoon… on Tuesdays when I take my son to the psychologist we get out around 7 or 8 and we get home at 10 or 11 at night.

Staying in the city was an important objective for all of the women I interviewed. Like Sonia, they explained that the resources available in the city and the conditions in general were much better inside the city limits of Buenos Aires. Time and money were other primary reasons cited for trying to remain in the city, particularly for mothers with young children. Despite the precarious housing situation in which all of the participants found themselves, their lives were in the city. The women I interviewed worked, had families, and sent their children to schools and doctors and afterschool programs in the city. Once they were evicted and with few housing options available, moving out of the city often meant they were separated from the networks, jobs, opportunities and resources that made up their life.

The housing situation in Buenos Aires and the opportunities available to women and their families in the form of jobs, access to social services and social and financial independence create a highly ambivalent situation that women and their families experience daily. On the one hand, Peruvian migrant women have many opportunities unavailable in their country of origin in the form of jobs, resources and services. On the other, the inability to access housing in Buenos Aires creates a highly precarious and disruptive situation in which women experience marginalization and discrimination because of their identity as mothers, Peruvians and migrants. As one woman explained,

"Buenos Aires is very pretty. It offers a lot of possibilities, but housing takes it all away."

A WOMAN'S WORK: MAKING A HOME

Once they are living inside a *casa tomada*, women struggle to create a sense of "home" for their children and families despite the precarious and crowded conditions inside. The struggle to create and provide a "safe" space is intertwined with women's identity, their ability to care for their families, their strategies to negotiate access to spaces and resources inside and outside of their home spaces. Gender identity and women's traditional roles as caretaker and homemaker play an important, contributing role in the dynamic of *casas tomadas* and in poor people's struggle for housing and their right to the city. Inside *casas tomadas,* women are responsible for negotiating shared spaces, like the kitchen, the bathroom, cleaning schedules and washing clothes. Mothers often rely on other women and relatives to care for their children or might lock their children inside the bedroom when they leave for work.

These traditional roles and responsibilities and the few options these women have, create a context in which they develop particular practices, strategies and relationships inside and outside of *casas tomadas*. Women sometimes depend on other women or mothers to watch their children and their rooms when they are out. Whenever possible they walk home together if it is late at night. Women will complain to one another when they or other residents have not completed their responsibilities.

In this sense, women are central figures in the daily struggle for housing and the right to the city. Many of the women I interviewed told me that they were the main

breadwinners because they had stable jobs cleaning houses, while their male partners worked occasionally in odd jobs when they were available. Women are also responsible for taking care of their children, looking for a place to live, and resolving conflicts inside *casas tomadas*. They play an important role in the political struggle for housing in protests and resistance to evictions. Furthermore, women are usually the recipients of government funded family welfare services. As a result, women's identity, their familial roles, and the practices in which they engage largely characterize the broader struggle for housing in Buenos Aires. In general, poor women's daily roles and responsibilities are representative of the larger struggle by the urban poor to access urban spaces and resources and make a life in the city (Fig. 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3).

Figure 5.1: Women and Children Protesting

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 5.2: Young mother and baby in housing protest

Source: Jonathan Brookings 2009

Figure 5.3: Mother and child in their home in a *casa tomada*

Source: Munoz 2009

Cecilia

Cecilia moved to Buenos Aires in the nineties when she was in her thirties. As she tells it, she comes from a successful, middle class family, but was never able to get a degree. She is a petite woman with dark skin and long curly hair that she dies blonde. When I met her she was wearing a woolen hat to cover up the black roots of her hair. "Look at my hair," she explained, "it looks so bad I have to wear a hat, but I don't have any money to dye it.

> My son's school comes first. I say to him, next month I'll dye my hair when I have paid your tuition. I want my son to be someone in life! I'm not… my sisters also couldn't be anything, but their sons are, you understand?" Let me tell you, I have one son. I think about the security of my son. I am Peruvian and my son is Argentine. I think about my son and I wouldn't like to think that he is in this situation (being evicted), that they come and throw us out as if we were criminals. I am no criminal, nor is my son and this is his country…. I didn't ask to be in this situation, not at all. I always paid for my room, always.

Cecilia's son is seven years old. He is a quiet, well-behaved child who usually plays alone, reading or doing homework. Cecilia had him when she was forty, and he is her only child. She tells me that she was dating a man for a long time before she got pregnant, but when she told him she was expecting he wanted her to have an abortion. She told him that she was already forty years old, that this was her only chance to have a child and she wasn't going to give it up. After her son was born, the father would come around at first but eventually stopped visiting. Cecilia finally gave up trying to make him have a relationship with his son. Since that time and perhaps because of it, Cecilia

devotes her life to her son. She only works on the weekends so she can be around if he needs her. Cecilia drops her son off and picks him up every day from the private school that he attends on a scholarship and on the weekends she takes her son with her to work. She is able to get by with the help of state welfare programs.

Cecilia's account of her life and experience living in Buenos Aires is based almost entirely around what she does for her son. When I met her the first time, she told me her personal story against the backdrop of our discussion of living in a *casa tomada.* I could not help but sense her feelings of guilt and frustration mixed with a steadfast resolve for what she was willing to do for her son and a pride in his achievements.

> Sometimes I just eat an egg because there is nothing to eat, but if my son needs shoes, I buy him shoes, or English books… but I want you to know, each time he brings his grades home, he has all As. People say to me, you educate your son well, and I say to them, "But you don't have to envy me for that, because when you want the best for their child, you just do it, little by little…" I say. I deprive myself of certain things for my son. I swear to you, eh? That is why I am all right despite this situation [refers to her housing situation and eviction].

When I interviewed Cecilia she was living and awaiting eviction in a large boarding house on Corrientes, two blocks from the Abasto Shopping Mall. She and the rest of the residents would be evicted three months later. Her room was small, but with a high ceiling, and a large armoire. It was also dark with a small window and a single light bulb that hung down from the ceiling. Like in all of the houses, Cecilia had a curtain that hung from her doorway, so that she could leave the door open and have some privacy. In the summer, the rooms were full of cockroaches. She told me, "One time an inspector

came and he explained, you can't live like this without fumigating, and much less with kids. That is what he said."

Despite the decaying and crowded conditions in *casas tomadas,* families struggle to create a home; a stable and safe place for their children. Like many of the other women I spoke to, when Cecilia had to go out at night, she would wait until her son fell asleep, or she would leave him doing his homework or playing alone and would lock the door behind her. This was common practice, because there were many single mothers and parents who worked the night shift when their kids were sleeping. When children are locked in their rooms at night, it is to both to keep them 'safe' inside and to keep others from entering.

It is difficult to imagine a bedroom in a *casa tomada* as a place in which women are able to create stable, safe and private spaces for themselves and their family members. Yet, these were places in which the women I interviewed had a certain degree of control in creating an intimate and stable space for themselves and their family. Many of the women had gone to great efforts to organize their rooms and to make them look comfortable. The curtains hanging on the doors marked a certain boundary and territory that was off limits to other residents. It also allowed the inhabitants of each room to be able to peek outside, while controlling what the other residents could see inside (Fig. 5.4).

Figure 5.4: Room with curtain and laundry hanging off of internal balcony

Source: Munoz 2009

Women's traditional roles and identities are simultaneously transformed and reinforced through situations and experiences in which gendered identities and roles are implemented to alleviate tensions and resolve conflicts. Inside and outside of the bedrooms women develop strategies and practices that allow them to make living in a *casa tomada* a less precarious experience, often using their own bodies and practices as obstacles or buffers. Not only do women assume the tasks of taking care of their families through cooking, cleaning and caring for children, but also they must constantly negotiate spaces, resources and time with the other residents inside *casas tomadas* to access the kitchen and bathroom facilities, or to use the water. Women also negotiate

other family members' use of the bathroom and other community spaces. Sara for example, tried to shield her young cousins from some of the daily challenges of negotiating spaces with so many people.

Sara

> [In *Gardel*] the bathroom is next to the kitchen, so if someone turns on the kitchen sink the water in the shower stops working. It is horrible to be standing in the shower with shampoo, soap and it is four degrees outside and someone starts using the kitchen sink. What do you do? It only happened to me one time. I would always try and take a quick shower every one or two days. It never happened to my little cousins, because since it happened to me I would always stand at the door when they were showering and take care of them. I would wait outside and say, "Oh, please can you wait to wash your plates because my cousin is taking a shower? And they would say, "Oh ok, will you let me know when your cousin is done?" So my cousin would finish showering and then the other one would go in and then I'd take both of them upstairs. And so they could both finish their showers with hot water.

Cecilia tells a similar story of trying to shield her son from the daily inconveniences and conflicts of routinely claiming shared spaces and resources:

> When I came here, the first thing I did was buy my son a toilet. He's always had one. We moved here, and he had his toilet here and it was awful because everyone criticized me. One day I answered back, I said, "Do you know why I put my son there?" Because there are many illnesses. I am a grown up, I don't sit down [on the toilet], but my son has to sit down to do his business. And I clean him because here you can find everything. My son could get infected with some illness and nobody, not you, not anyone is going to take care of my son. You are also a mother just like I am, but you don't take the time that I do with my son, because you don't want to, you don't feel like it, but I do.

By having her son use a separate basin, Cecilia felt that she could try to keep her son safe (in this case, from illnesses) and also offer him some semblance of privacy and intimacy. Cecilia did everything possible to separate her son from the experience of living in a *casa tomada*. In doing so she was criticized by the other residents because they saw her as trying to separate herself and her son from the rest of the residents.

THE STIGMA OF LIVING IN A *CASA TOMADA*

Cecilia was adamant in distinguishing herself and her son from the other residents in the house, a common practice among many of the women I spoke to. The women in this study all spoke of the social stigma connected to living in a *casa tomada* and often tried to explain that they were different from the other residents. Cecilia did this by highlighting the way she took care of her son. Sara, who was much younger than Cecilia and who had arrived in Buenos Aires with her aunt and her young cousins, described her experience in a different way, highlighting her own embarrassment and frustration about her situation.

Sara

> For nine months we lived in that place that was an embarrassment. I studied in the school on Pueyrredón and LaValle, practically next to where we lived, and every day after school I would walk around the block like seven times waiting for all my friends to go home so that they wouldn't know that I lived there. They would always say, "That building is full of criminals." I would always defend it. I'd say, "Well maybe there are delinquents, but there are probably lots of families that live there that don't do those things." They would say to me, "But Sara, if you saw that people were stealing and doing drugs you

wouldn't live there." And I would say to them, "Maybe, but sometimes the need is greater." No one ever knew that I lived there.

Like Cecilia, Sara's account of her first experience living in a *casa tomada,* highlights the ambivalence of the residents with their own situation. Many of the residents I interviewed reproduced similar narratives about the other residents living in *casas tomadas*, blaming others for not cleaning, for making too much noise, for not paying bills on time or for the criminal activity happening inside the building. Others, like Cecilia, seemed much more frustrated and ashamed of their situation. In her article (2004), Guano writes about how the middle class socially and spatially deny citizenship to the lower classes through narratives that criminalize the poor and their struggle to remain in the city. At one point during my field research I wrote:

Field notes, September 4, 2009
One of the things I find with many of the women that I have interviewed and work with, especially some of the women in their forties or older, is that they all share a sense of guilt for their situation of being in a house that is to be evicted. I have sensed this with Luisa and also with Cecilia when I interviewed her yesterday. Maybe it is the feeling of helplessness, or of being in a situation in which they never thought they would find themselves, nor one that they want to have admit is theirs, that is extremely frustrating and embarrassing, and one they struggle ***not*** to identify with. Luisa spends a lot of time talking to me about how she comes from the middle class and how her family was well off in Peru.

WOMEN AS THE PUBLIC FACE OF THE STRUGGLE FOR HOUSING

The roles and responsibilities that women assume, to care for and protect their children and other family members inside *casas tomadas,* are part of a broader political

struggle for housing and in their relationship with the state. Women, mothers and their children are the public face of the housing struggle. In marches and demonstrations women often take off work to protest with their children, pushing strollers, holding on to their young children's hands and carrying them in their arms when they get tired. For CIBA and other organizations involved in the housing struggle in Buenos Aires, the visible presence of women and children is an important and forceful message that is used to highlight the real effects and injustices of the housing crisis in the city. Similarly, during organized resistance to evictions, in which the act of resisting is also used to publicize the plight of poor people's struggle for decent housing, women become the public face of each standoff with city police. Thus gender, in the form of women's roles and identity as mothers and caretakers, is not only experienced inside *casas tomadas,* but is also employed and displayed as an important public and political strategy in the struggle for housing.

For some of the women who had been a part of CIBA for many years, this collective action was inspiring and allowed them a moment and a space to be able to contextualize their personal struggle into a more collective, social and political one. Julia, a women in her seventies, explained, "I love the protests. I used to go all the time with my friend. The whole time I felt good, I felt young!" Others however were more ambivalent towards this public action and identity, with some women feeling equally empowered and uncomfortable. As I discuss in Chapter IV, many of the residents of *casas tomadas* were reticent about participating in protests, and often marched only so that CIBA might later find them a place to live.

CONCLUSION

Ironically, although Peruvian migrant women are employed to work as maids, nannies and servants in the homes of wealthier Argentines, they are barred from being able to access even the most basic comforts of housing and home. The housing and labor conditions that many of these women were able to benefit from when they first arrived to Buenos Aires are no longer available once they start to create a more stable life for themselves and their families inside the city. Poor migrant women and their families are unable to create more permanent and stable urban spaces and lifestyles, impacting their abilities to build on what they have accomplished and to benefit from the numerous resources available to them in the city.

The struggle for housing highlights how women's identities and roles as mothers, wives and caretakers are transformed, exploited and also limited and controlled, as they attempt to find ways to appropriate urban spaces and livelihoods in which they can both provide for and improve future opportunities for themselves and their families.

Particularly poignant in the role that gender plays for women living in *casas tomadas*, is that in many ways their role as mothers, partners and caretakers is the very reason that they are excluded from housing and from the right to remain in the city (Fenster, 2005). As young women who had just arrived to Buenos Aires alone, women have no problems finding a place to live in a boarding house or hotel. However, when they are finally able to bring their family to Buenos Aires from their place of origin, or when they are married and start to have children, they are suddenly excluded from most formal and informal housing options inside the city.

Gender and identity are inextricably tied to experiences of housing and home through the ways in which women embody their identities as partners, mothers and caretakers (Macgregor-Wise, 2000; Massey, 1994; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). This identity is lived and experienced through domestic acts that are tied to the 'home' and to acts of home-making. In this sense, home continues to be imagined and experienced through women, in terms of their domestic responsibilities, and particularly in their roles as caretakers and mothers. As a result, migrant women are at the forefront of the struggle to stay in the city.

As Peruvian women struggle to make a place for themselves and their families, they reproduce and to a certain extent, reinvent their identities and roles and mothers and caretakers, and often the "head of household". The gendered, national and class aspects of the Peruvian migrant experience all come into play as the inhabitants of *casas tomadas* engage in strategies to develop some form of spatial stability inside Buenos Aires. Their reality and experiences inside the hotels and also outside in public spaces and in relation to the state, can all be understood as forms of protest and political action. Yet, they are also mostly simple acts of survival as the inhabitants struggle to hold on to their ability to make decisions over their lives and future for themselves and their family while living in a context of chronic uncertainty.

CHAPTER VI

Gardel: Spaces of Contention and Coexistence

RELATIONSHIPS OF TIME, SPACE AND CONTROL

Urban migrants go to great lengths to remain in the city. Residents of *casas tomadas* engage in informal negotiations and make deals with other residents in order to resolve problems and access resources that they cannot afford or attain individually. Residents must negotiate access to shared resources in spaces that are crowded and generally in very poor conditions. Thus, the strategies and livelihood practices residents routinely employ inside *casas tomadas* are often in reaction to and representative of specific spatial and temporal conditions. An analysis of the role of space and time in the context of sharing resources in precarious conditions contributes to understanding the unique and particular challenges and struggles of squatter residents.

I draw on Doreen Massey's (2005) definition of space in which she offers three key characteristics. First, she (2005) argues that space should be understood as multiscalar and a product of interrelations produced through interactions. Second, she defines space through its multiplicity, "the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist" (9). Third, she argues "space is always under construction" (9). This relational, continuous and heterogeneous understanding of space is particularly useful in contemplating and examining the dynamic, contentious and crowded reality inside *casas tomadas.*

At the same time, space also impacts and shapes the way that people interact and the kinds of relationships they form (Sack, 1993; Massey, 1994). These understandings of

space are particularly relevant to the reality inside *casas tomadas* where objects, bodies, needs, demands and expectations are entangled in multiple ways and residents are forced to live together and share resources in very cramped quarters. Residents create strategies that allow them to adapt to the spatial and social limitations and the challenges they face on a daily basis (Simone, 2004, 2008). Drawing on these approaches to space provides a theoretical framework for understanding the reality of residents of *casas tomadas.*

Inside *casas tomadas* relationships and interactions marked by power struggles and negotiation of one's time and access to space and resources are continuous. Power is constantly changing hands and is often based on one's ability to access something in a particular moment. Residents therefore interact and engage in relationships that allow them to secure resources more effectively and efficiently (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). These relationships may be long lasting or a response to a particular moment. Importantly these relationships and interactions highlight how residents actively and constantly engage with other residents and make their presence known.

Remaining exclusively at the scale of the house, this chapter responds to the following research questions: What are the strategies and relationships that residents of *casas tomadas* develop, in order to create a stable space or "home" despite (and because of) their spatial situation and the social conditions under which they live? How do residents' relationships, interactions and routine practices challenge the more ambiguous and uncertain conditions of living in a *casa tomada?* The questions are designed to highlight the tensions between the physical, temporal and social conditions, and

residents' agency and actions that they develop in reaction to these structural limitations and challenges.

Drawing on Peruvian migrant women's accounts of living in a *casa tomada*, this chapter explores how residents routinely confront spatial restraints and shared access to resources. Through an analysis of spatial practices and social relationships, I examine how, in the limited and crowded social and spatial confines of *casas tomadas*, residents employ strategies that are both shaped by spatial and temporal conditions and used to control and maneuver access to resources and spaces.

Sara arrived to Buenos Aires in 2006 with her aunt Violet and two nephews. Since then she has always lived in *casas tomadas*, mainly because her Aunt Elena has four young children, making it difficult for them to rent a place to live. Her account begins to tell the story of the social relationships and spatial dynamics that occur inside *casas tomadas.*

NEGOTIATING PRIVACY

Sara

> Someone told my aunt that there was a building on the corner of Pueyrredón and LaValle where they were selling rooms. My aunt mentioned this to the rest of us and we went to check the room out. The room was enormous! We got lost in that room it was so big and beautiful! And it had this amazing balcony! *And* it was on the third floor! That was the best thing about it! It was on the third floor! The building didn't have any water except on the first floor and we thought, "Well, if we're on the third floor we don't have to go up too many stairs and the water isn't too far away, it's feasible…" But we couldn't afford it, because they wanted $1000 pesos for the room ($400 US) and we didn't have it and we

> needed to pay immediately! So my aunt talked to one of her neighbors from the hotel where she was living, and asked her if she wanted to split the room and share the space for the time being. And the woman agreed. So my aunt bought the room, splitting it with the woman and her daughter. We put up a curtain in the middle of the room. Thank god the woman and her daughter were pretty quiet. But soon after, she brought her cousin, her aunt, her brother in law and her brother! There were twelve of us living in that room! With six people it was ok, but twelve? We didn't know what to do, but what could we say? Half of the room was hers! You know what I mean? It's her property! I do what I want on my property and you can do what you want on your property… with a curtain dividing everything. We lived there for nine months. We moved in July and we were evicted in April.

Spaces and resources are shared by many inside *casas tomadas,* blurring the division between public and private realms and forcing residents to constantly negotiate their place, identity and access to resources. In this spatial and social context, residents are hard-pressed to create a sense of stability or "home" for themselves and their families. Residents engage in certain kinds of practices and relationships that allow them to "get things done" while confronting the daily social and spatial challenges of living in a *casa tomada.*

These 'close-knit' relationships and dealings can sometimes be problematic for families in the long run, transforming what was originally meant to be a solution to an urgent problem, into a complex and often contentious situation to which residents are bound in the long term. Sara laments, "[With twelve] there were too many of us. That is why we had [originally] bought the room with this woman, because there were only two

of them. That was basically the idea, but she kept bringing more and more people."

Sara's account of living in *Pueyrredón*[45] is one example of how families must make immediate decisions and commitments to others by pooling their resources. It also highlights the long-term effects of immediate decisions and how original agreements and resolutions transform overtime, as the living situation and needs of residents also change.

GARDEL THE TERRIBLE

Gardel is known for its large population and small, run down spaces. It is a highly complex and contentious place where residents experience conflict, violence and instability as well as a sense of community and support and where they try to build and maintain a stable home-space for themselves and their families. When I started my field research at the beginning of 2009, *Gardel* was one of the longest lasting *casas tomadas* of all of the houses working with CIBA. The legal case for eviction had already lasted for over three years and it was still unclear when the eviction would occur.[46]

In 2009, based on the informal census taken by CIBA, there were approximately 150 residents, made up primarily of Peruvians, Paraguayans, and some Argentines.[47] The large presence of both Paraguayans and Peruvians meant that moments of conflict or dispute were sometimes exacerbated by national identity and affiliations as residents took

[45] *Pueyrredón* was a block and half from the apartment that I rented and I could see it from my back window. The residents had already been evicted by the time I started my field research, and it remained empty and unfinished throughout the period of my field research.

[46] Jorge (from CIBA) attributed the longevity of *Gardel*'s eviction process to the fact that it was part of an older judicial model of eviction. "In the case of *Gardel* it is moving through the courts like during the old times. Today the cases are resolved much faster. *Gardel* is from past legislation and that it why it is taking so long." (Jorge, 11.24.09) *Gardel* was finally evicted in November 2013.

[47] Before each eviction CIBA does a census of each house to determine how many people are living there and then shares this information with the welfare office that also takes a census to determine who is eligible for the subsidy.

sides with their compatriots. These national divisions however were quite fluid and based on specific situations and moments of contention or conflict and not entirely a continuous or permanent condition of the internal relations inside the house, especially among the women who interacted with one another on a regular basis.

is a wide, four story, red brick building with small, symmetrical windows in the front and a small, plain entrance on the side. "" received its name from the small pedestrian street it is on, named after the tango singer, "Carlos Gardel" an important historical figure who grew up in the Abasto neighborhood.[48] The hotel sits half a block away from the large Abasto Shopping Mall, and two blocks from the five-star Hyatt Hotel. Most of the other buildings and shops on the street are recently built, high-end restaurants, apartments, boutiques, and souvenir shops geared toward international tourists visiting the mall or perusing the neighborhood for tango music and other accessories.

A small, thin metal door marks the entrance to *Gardel*. Once inside there is a short, dark hallway and the sudden smell of fried food and other unidentifiable odors and sounds. The walls are painted a pale green and grey and after years of neglect, much of the paint is chipped off and covered by mold and cobwebs. Small children run back and forth through the main entrance, either coming in or going out to the walkway to play. There is a stairwell about 15 feet from the front door, and the narrow, dark hallway veers

[48] Virtually everything in the neighborhood of Abasto seems to have some reference to Carlos Gardel, the internationally famed tango singer from the 1920s who grew up in the neighborhood.

left and then continues straight towards the end of the building. On the right of the hallway are two open patios divided by the kitchen, a bathroom and another bedroom.

Each floor has approximately 15 to 18 bedrooms. The rooms in *Gardel* are small and box-like with low ceilings and measuring about 250cm X 350cm (8 X 12 feet). Entire families, sometimes of up to four or five people, may live in one bedroom and use it for all their activities—eating, sleeping, studying, preparing food, playing, watching television—as well as storing all of their belongings. If they leave anything outside they run the risk of having it stolen. Bunk beds offer families some additional space to sleep, work, move around and store belongings. Beds and bed frames are usually full of people's things and at night might hold two or three people to a bed. Some of the residents had gone to great lengths to fix their rooms for themselves and their family despite their run down condition and the imminent threat of eviction.[49]

Inside, many residents have refrigerators, televisions, DVD players and even personal computers. In a few of the rooms I was able to see small air-conditioner units hanging from the walls. Residents access cable television through a neighbor who charges each family $15 pesos ($3.00 US) a month to connect to his service. They also have electricity, water and gas that they pay bi-monthly. Each floor has a person who collects money for the bills, though not everyone pays on a regular basis.

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[49] In all of the houses, residents spent a lot of time fixing bedrooms. In one of the more stable *casas tomadas* where residents were not at such an immediate risk of being evicted, a father had taken advantage of the tall ceilings by constructing a second floor loft so that his son had his own bedroom.

When residents are at home they are usually trying to cook a meal, wash clothes or simply take care of daily duties and responsibilities to their families and the house. When they are home, many residents keep their doors open, covering the entrance to their bedroom with a bed sheet in the form of a curtain so that they can maintain some privacy, and also move easily in and out of their rooms to other parts of the house.

The constant struggle of negotiating spaces and accessing resources is a common problem in all of the houses, but one that always seemed particularly taxing on the residents of *Gardel*. Each floor has one or two bathrooms that most of the families must share (some bedrooms have a private bathroom). The bathrooms are somewhat clean and in basic working condition, perhaps because so many people are invested in maintaining these spaces for their personal use. But they are small and rundown and can only be used by one person at a time. On each floor there is a main bathroom that is immediately next to a very small and grease-stained kitchen. Both the bathroom and kitchen use the same connections, which means that when someone is taking a shower, if someone else turns on the sink in the kitchen, the water in the bathroom becomes cold and the pressure drops. This poses a real problem for residents, especially during the morning and evening hours, when many families are trying to start the day. As Sara explains, in the winter months, with no central heating and morning temperatures around 0 degrees Celsius, it is especially difficult:

Sara

> There are six burners for 18 families, six! And the kitchen is tiny! The bathroom is tiny! Also, if you are taking a shower and somebody goes into the kitchen and uses the sink, the water in the shower stops running… And so there you are with

> shampoo and soap, it is four degrees Celsius and someone all of a sudden turns on the hot water in the kitchen! There were women who would start screaming," Damn it! Shit! Turn on whatever you want except the hot water faucet!" They would start screaming because, well… they are just like that… but we were new to the house, we couldn't start screaming at everyone. To just be standing there freezing when it is four degrees is …So you try to take a shower as fast as you can before anyone turns on the hot water.

The bathroom was a common source of conflict inside all of the *casas tomadas.* During my interviews residents commonly described the bathroom as a contentious space either because residents did not clean, or they spent too much time inside, or because residents refused to invest in maintaining or fixing it, or simply because it was uncomfortable to have to share such an intimate space with so many people. "There are tensions" Sonia told me when I interviewed her in her bedroom in *Gardel*.

> ... for fourteen families to have to use the bathroom to do their needs and take a shower, we always stand there, knocking on the door, "are you done? No? Hurry up!!!!" You know… the needs of the body take time, and there you are waiting on the other side of the door. You want to go in and take a piss and you can't. It is total chaos to have to live together (*Es todo un caos convivir*).

Carla, a Peruvian immigrant who lives in another *casa tomada* with her three year old daughter and her husband, referred to the bathroom as a space in which people communicate other frustrations and problems:

> I feel like there are divisions. There is one woman who becomes very impatient when she needs to use the bathroom. She knocks on the door and when you say, "one moment, I just came in." She says, "Hurry up, I'm going to pee on myself"

> and other things we are not used to hearing. And if you ask her, "what is your problem?" She says things like, "you shouldn't be here in this country.

These actions and comments highlight how some residents employ particular strategies to control their and others' access to space and resources. They highlight how certain residents attempt to both control other residents' use and their right to spaces and resources inside the houses by pressuring them to hurry up and questioning their presence in the country. Perhaps as a result of these kinds of encounters and interactions, Carla later said that she felt very uncomfortable in one of the bathrooms. "I don't like to take a shower there. Now we all have to share that bathroom because the water heater broke in the other bathroom, but I don't like to be in that bathroom, I don't know why."

In *Tucuman*, another *casa tomada* that used to be a hotel for students, Gloria showed me how individual residents had appropriated six or seven bathroom stalls, putting locks on the doors so that they could control who used the bathroom and keep it clean for themselves and their children. Additionally, in many of the houses, families had to bathe with cold water because residents refused to invest in a water heater for the house. Families would buy individual gas cylinders to use for heating water to be able to wash themselves and their young children, especially in the winter months.

Residents often chose not to invest in maintaining the house where they were living. Many were weary of investing their own money and watching other residents profit without also contributing. Additionally, residents' inability to anticipate when they would be evicted meant that most residents refused to put money towards improvements

in the house because they had no way of knowing if they would even benefit from them and for how long.

"WAITING IS EXHAUSTING" –SONIA, *GARDEL*

The routine struggle of residents inside *casas tomadas* is also representative of a temporal reality that is regulated by their constant sharing and negotiating of daily resources and spaces. Bourdieu's (2000) discussion on time highlights relationships, dispositions and practices that produce a temporal experience inside a particular social context and condition, and thus offers a perspective from which to explore how residents develop relationships and strategies inside *casas tomadas*. Residents spend a considerable time waiting and negotiating access to resources and spaces. The strategies and practices that they develop can be seen as a way to gauge and maneuver what little control they have over some of the more mundane aspects of daily life. Like Massey (1994, 2005) who discusses the multiple ways that different groups and people experience space, Bourdieu claims that time is not experienced by everyone in the same way. He argues, "social agents temporalize themselves" through practice, but that not everyone is in a place of power do this. Instead, for those whose lives are based on a 'game of chance' in which agents are in a long-lasting situation of powerlessness, time takes on a particular meaning and experience. "Time is really only experienced when the quasi-automatic coincidence between expectations and chances, expectations and the world which is there to fulfill them, is broken" (Bourdieu, 2000: 221).

Residents of *casas tomadas* are deeply aware of time, because they are constantly forced to negotiate their time and space with other inhabitants, without any clear

assurance of the outcome. Very little can be anticipated inside *casas tomadas*; will a burner be free when I get home? Will I be able to take a shower without anyone bothering me? How long will I have to wait to use the bathroom? Will I be able to use the bathroom without interruption? Will I be able to sleep through the night without being disturbed? All of these factors are constantly and routinely considered, highlighting how time is very much part of a "game of chance" (Bourdieu, 2000) to which residents are subjected. Residents therefore invent ways to counter this game through relationships and other strategies they employ routinely or in specific moments and under certain conditions.

Residents spend a great deal of time and effort engaging in routine strategies, practices, interactions and relationships in order to ensure their access to shared resources and spaces inside the house. In *Gardel*, negotiating time and space in the kitchen also involves particular strategies and relational interactions between the residents. In all of the houses, the kitchens are always organized and sparse, largely due to the fact that residents cannot keep any belongings in the kitchen or they will be stolen. In *Gardel*, the kitchen is the size of a long and narrow walk-in closet. The water heater is at one end and there are six small burners connected to a gas outlet. The outlets are old and badly connected and it is common to smell gas and frying meat at night when walking past the kitchen. Sharing the kitchen in *Gardel* was particularly difficult because of the size, the few burners that existed and the number of families that were forced to share them. Residents negotiate their access to the kitchen through spatial strategies that employ

different objects, types of interactions and time in order to prepare meals for themselves and their family, as Sara explains below.

Sara

> In order to find a free burner… the kettles boil, they boil. From the morning to the afternoon, they boil the water and then they throw it out and then they boil more water. Why? So at 12 o'clock in the afternoon they have a burner to cook on. Do you have a burner for the day? Well then, you're as happy as a clam. But if you don't have a burner and you get home at 12 to make lunch for your family, well then you have to wait and you have to ask someone, "when you are done cooking will you give me your burner?" They say, give me your kettle. And when they are done cooking they yell, "Sara, I put your kettle on the burner!

Residents attempt to manipulate time and the use of spaces and resources in the way they employ objects, as in the use of a simply kettle. This often involves an important degree of planning and energy with respect to accessing important basic resource such as a burner to cook food. It also usually involves juggling food and utensils and bowls from different spaces, which adds to the time and energy of preparing a simple meal. Families cut and prepare all the ingredients in their bedroom as they wait for a burner to free up so that they can prepare lunch or dinner for themselves and their children. In other houses that I visited, it was easier for families to purchase and install ovens in their bedrooms or in the hallways outside of their room. As Carla from another *casa tomada* explained about the situation where she lives, "There is only one kitchen, but each family has their own oven", easing some of the problems of negotiating time and space to cook. Gloria, who lived in another *casa tomada* told me that she usually

avoided using the kitchen. Instead, she would prepare food in the house where she worked and then take it home to eat with her daughter.

For some women, the kitchen was also a space of friendship and support. Cecilia who lived in *Corrientes* told me, when I asked her if there were places inside the house where she felt comfortable:

> Here I don't feel uncomfortable; I like to be here, you know why? Because I have my friends. I have *La Boliviana* (the Bolivian woman), I have *La Abuela* (the Grandmother) and we start chatting and some other women arrive and we all start talking and cooking and making jokes. That is what I miss. That is what I miss.
>
> **Solange:** So, even though there are a lot of problems, you have a community?
>
> Yes, I do.

Cecilia had already moved out of *Corrientes* into a hotel where she paid rent so that her son would not have to experience the eviction, but she maintained her room so that she would be able to receive the subsidy. Often she would return to *Corrientes* in the evening to spend time cooking and talking with her friends.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS AND INTIMATE SPACES

Residents develop strategic relationships that allow them to claim access to spaces and resources. These relationships are representative of a particular social order or set of codes the majority of residents enter into and generally respect. This "order" helps residents anticipate their situation and offers some sense of stability amidst the frustration

that many residents experience living in a *casa tomada* and waiting for eviction (Bourdieu, 2000).

Despite the informal and ambiguous character of *casas tomadas,* resident's claims to "ownership' of certain spaces are usually recognized and respected by others. Residents often justified their claim to rooms in informal hotels and *casas tomadas* by explaining that they had bought or were paying rent for the room. As Carla, another young Peruvian woman explained to me, "If you buy a room from someone in these places, you know they aren't the owner. But, I don't know… you think it is going to last…you feel like, since you are paying money for something it should last…." Even once residents have purchased a room they still must continue to negotiate their presence and space with other residents through spatial strategies, routine practices and interactions that are representative of the daily reality of life inside a *casa tomada.*

Resident's relationships and routine practices coexist with moments and situations of conflict, chaos and uncertainty to create an uneasy coexistence as they wait for the day of eviction. Individuals and groups occupy spaces for their own interests, trying to keep to themselves even as they are in constant contact with other residents. In many ways *casas tomadas* are extremely contained spaces and communities. What happens inside the walls of a *casas tomada* is often representative of a unique set of social codes and practices that might be radically different from the neighborhood right outside their door. How daily livelihood practices and routine strategies are developed and coexist with moments and situations of conflict and uncertainty is the focus of the rest of this chapter.

Sara

How residents interact inside *casas tomadas* is representative of particularized spatial, social relationships and exchanges, which allow residents to maneuver control of daily needs and the challenges of sharing scarce resources and spaces with so many people and interests. Sara's account illustrates the complex and seemingly contradictory character of *casas tomadas.*

> *Pueyrredón* was a disaster. It was a 14-story building that didn't have a door, just an entrance. Anyone could come and go as they pleased. It was like no one was responsible for anything! Everything was dirty, you would go in and the stench was awful! You would climb up the stairs and there would be guys standing on the steps smoking pot and using other drugs. They would all say hello to you. I don't know why, but all of them always said hello. That is what surprised me the most. They would say hi to me, my aunts, my cousins, all of us! *"Hola Doña, hola niño, hola doña, buen día o cómo anda? Todo bien?"* Just like that!

Later in our interview Sara described how one of these boys would end up killing himself, falling from a balcony onto the first floor in a drug-induced stupor. Sara's narrative describes how she and other residents develop relationships and strategies of communicating with other residents that allow them to maintain routine access to basic resources and some stability and security.

Sara

> …. I got into the habit of saying please and thank you. It is something so simple, so simple. So I started to learn when there wasn't anyone in the bathroom and since everyone knew me by then, when I was going in, I would say, "Oh, please, I am going to take a shower, if someone comes to turn on the hot water can you

> tell them that I am taking a shower?" I would take a shower quickly and then say, "Oh thank you, thank you!

Sara later explained, "The people in *Gardel* ended up really caring about us" (*La gente de Gardel nos llegó a querer).* After two months they really liked us. I go and visit now and everyone talks to me."

Sara's strategy of communicating with others seems quite natural for her. Others told me about how through their experiences of living in *casas tomadas* they had developed different strategies and understandings of how to confront and manage the temporal, spatial and social challenges of life in a *casa tomada.* For example, Sonia—also from *Gardel*—discussed how she had developed strategies of dealing with so many different people in such tight quarters.

> Before I thought that if someone yells, I should yell back, but after living with so many people for so many years…I try to get along with everyone. I mean this experience of living with so many people, 12 years… makes you learn how to adapt to situations. If you avoid gossip or lots of discussions and the arguments and you can get along with everyone, you'll be ok. Some people are more hysterical than others, but just avoid them and well, try to help people out. I try to be supportive, but…. Many times I keep quiet to avoid problems.

Avoiding problems is a tricky but necessary strategy that most residents practice inside *casas tomadas.* This often means staying out of domestic disputes, ignoring the selling of drugs and other illegal practices, and responding in ways that avoid further

igniting conflict with other residents. Residents remain quiet because it is too risky and as Gloria seems to suggest below, futile to get involved:

Gloria

> They fight, bam, bam and I just shut the door, and I don't get involved. When they drink, or there are problems because someone lent someone money, or because they didn't give it back, or because she slept with her husband, or because he stole…that is why people fight. You get involved and the next day they are kissing and making up and you look bad. I got involved once, there was a young couple, and the girl was tiny. They had children and the husband was always beating her up. So one day I went and screamed at him, "Hit me, hit me you asshole!" The girl was crying… Well after three or four days everything was the same. Just the other day he hit her again. I don't get involved.

Residents also often remain quiet when their belongings are lost or stolen, a common occurrence inside *casas tomadas.* In *Gardel*, women know that if they hang their clothes to dry on the roof that they need to keep an eye out, so that no one steals anything. People generally keep all of their belongings in their bedroom in order to ensure that nothing is stolen. Families spend a lot of time and effort watching out for their things. As Sonia explained,

> [We share] the bathroom, the kitchen and the patio where we hang clothes out to dry. But you have to keep an eye out because if you aren't careful they take your clothes, so I am always there watching. The last time I had to clean the bathroom… because I have to clean two times a month. I arrived at night, so in the morning at 5 am I take my cloth and my detergent and start cleaning, but then I came back to the room to give my daughter her milk and when I returned my detergent wasn't there anymore. Just like that! Not twenty minutes and only three neighbors had gone in to the bathroom. I suspected that it was one woman

> and everyone else said, yeah, it is probably her, but what can you do? Nothing. You don't really know who it is and who it isn't. It's gone. That's it.

Sonia's conclusion is one that I heard often from the women I interviewed. Stealing was a common occurrence and one that I think most residents accepted as simply part of their housing experience. Even in *Pasteur,* one of the more stable houses working with CIBA during my field research, Sara complained about how her clothes had gone missing: "I've lost a raincoat, a towel, my aunt Violet's sweatshirt and no one knows who it is! We don't know! I can't say anything to anyone because I don't know who it is!"

Although quite common, the stealing of things inside *casas tomadas* has important effects on the internal dynamic and morale of the residents inside the houses. Residents remain quiet because they have no choice. Without proof, if they accuse someone of stealing, they run the risk of disrupting the precarious *convivencia*[50] of a house's internal dynamic and delicate sense of community. At the same time it means that residents trust no one: Sonia's assertion that, "there must be a few people who don't steal, but no one knows," suggests that everyone is a potential suspect.

Stealing is a common practice in part because of the ambiguous and porous divisions between private and public spaces inside these houses. Residents try to create separate spaces from the more public and shared areas of the rest of the house whenever possible. This is a difficult task for many reasons: noises from the hallways and other bedrooms flow through the rest of the building; people walk past doorways and peer in to other people's rooms; and loud voices, parties, arguments and physical violence in one

[50] *Convivencia* is the Spanish equivalent of coexistence or cohabitation.

bedroom or in one part of the house easily flows through the rest of the house, often making it difficult for families to sleep or even simply relax.

Sara

> In *Gardel* you can't ever really sleep. You fall asleep and in the other room they are beating the crap out of each other and you hear everything. Or a drug addict went into someone's bedroom and now they are shooting up, or the police arrived and you wonder why they are there. It is an adrenaline that keeps you going and you say, when is it going to happen? When is it going to happen? It is an uncertainty.

Like in many of their daily routine activities, residents can never be certain if, when and how they will be able to sleep, relax or simply have some undisrupted time with family. Sometimes, residents play music at a high volume invading the house with cumbia or hip hop, subjecting the entire population of the house often late at night when some of the residents are trying to sleep. Residents often complained about the noise they were subjected to inside the houses.

Field Notes: April 10, 2009: House Meeting in Gardel

We arrived at 9 o'clock pm. One of the apartments was playing music very loudly and Rocio complained to the woman we were talking to. The woman responded by saying that was nothing, that one of the apartments on the third or fourth floor play music with large speakers that make the entire house move. Apparently, no one says anything.

These routine practices of remaining silent or not engaging in house disputes or specific problems should not be understood as passive responses to particular situations or conflicts. Instead they are strategies that allow residents to ensure that they maintain access to resources and to minimize their vulnerability (Simone, 2008). Inside the houses,

women and their families focus on maintaining stable aspects of relationships with other residents while filtering out the more disruptive and problematic elements of living in a *casa tomada*.

At the same time, the ways in which public and private spaces and activities overlap, compels residents to constantly work at maintaining and controlling their claim to spaces inside *casas tomadas*. The permeability of the public and the private domains inside a *casa tomada* is most evident when one watches the children inside the houses. They run and play; moving through patios and hallways, running from room to room with their friends and all the other children from the house. Claudio, a schoolteacher who lived and worked in the neighborhood of Abasto told me that when children from *casas tomadas* go to school, the teachers have noticed that they have a hard time recognizing the different meanings and uses of spaces. He told me that they seem to give equal significance and value to all spaces, while other students more readily recognize spatial boundaries. Claudio explained that it is similar in how they listen and hear things, because the children of *casas tomadas* grow up hearing everything around them.

COEXISTING AND COMMUNITY

Throughout this chapter I have focused on many of the practices and strategies that residents develop and employ in the face of adverse conditions and complex social and spatial realities inside *casas tomadas.* Much of my focus has been on the complex and contentious character of *casas tomadas* and how residents develop ways to counteract this reality in order to complete daily responsibilities and routine practices. Some of the women I interviewed focused their testimonies on the hardships and

frustrations of living in a *casa tomada* and other aspects of their life. Some told me that they were using my interviews as a sort of catharsis, "a way to *desahogarme* (vent), because I haven't told anyone" (Natalia). This meant that during my interviews women often spent a lot of time describing what were intense and difficult experiences of arriving to Buenos Aires and the frustrations of living in a *casa tomada.*

However, as some of the excerpts illustrate, there is also a sense of solidarity and community that exist inside *casas tomadas,* one that was less discussed in my interviews, but that I was able to witness in different moments during my field research. Women often accompanied one another back and forth to meetings at CIBA so that they did not have to walk alone late at night. Residents often paid some of the older women inside the houses to clean, in order for them to earn some money to live on. Friendships are made, couples fall in love and children are rarely alone, watched over and taken care of by many adults. Marilu, a Peruvian woman in her fifties who was living in *Pasteur* at the time of our interview explained how the women often sit around on the patio talking. As she puts it,

> Sometimes we talk on the patio… when we are well, because sometimes we are all a little crazy. It's like living in a family, sometimes I complain, I get annoyed about the injustices, but later when something happens you feel bad. Because now we know each other, we are used to each other. I don't want to start over again. You get used to something and then you miss it.

The ability to create a sense of community was clearly easier in some houses than others and often depended on the size, space and the population. As I have already mentioned,

Pasteur was a hotel with a relatively small population made up of Peruvian women. In *Gardel* it was much more difficult to achieve a general sense of community, and yet it existed in spatially and temporally fragmented ways.

Acknowledging the spatially and temporally fragmented character of *casas tomadas* helps to develop a more nuanced and complex analysis or exploration of life inside these spaces. Relationships are developed, as residents rely and depend on others' help and support in staking their claims to spaces and services. Residents' struggle to develop private and somewhat stable spaces for themselves and their families are constantly and often simultaneously both challenged and reinforced through interactions, relationships and routine strategies with other residents.

CONCLUSIONS

Residents employ relationships, interactions and routine practices to counteract the spatial and temporal ambiguity and uncertainty inside *casas tomadas.* These practices and relationships contribute to creating a sense of community and stability, allowing residents some security, solidarity and ability to control certain elements and conditions of life inside a *casa tomada.* They also shape a highly uncertain everyday existence in which time, spaces and things must constantly be negotiated. Residents instead cautiously and strategically interact with others in ways that will potentially allow them to obtain what they need, but rarely with any guarantees. From the sharing of bedrooms to reserving a burner by boiling water all morning long, residents find creative and specific ways to acquire basic needs for themselves and their families. Many of these strategies and their outcomes may be spontaneous, short term and transitory. The

following day residents wake up and begin again, with few opportunities to anticipate the time they will need or have to accomplish basic functions and daily responsibilities.

In this sense the relationships that residents form with one another have an important strategic character to them with respect to the dependence that residents have on one another to be able to get things done. These relationships are part of a delicate order or *convivencia* in which most residents live together and therefore rely on one another. Residents are cognizant of this dependence and therefore create relationships that will maintain some sense of *convivencia* and allow them some control over their lives. At the same time, as I have shown in this chapter, residents' reliance on one another creates a real sense of community. Women form relationships of support and often spend time sharing stories, talking among themselves and also helping one another out with tasks. In the evenings, after weekly meetings or events, women would always walk home together or talk among each other about different things happenings in their lives.

These are not clear-cut experiences, but instead offer a framework for exploring the multiple ways that residents use and give meaning to spaces. Although in this Chapter I have focused specifically on the internal dynamic of *casas tomadas,* it is important to continue to frame the experience of home within the broader context of the city. How residents experience these home-conditions also reflect how they experience other spaces in the city, as in the case of children from *casas tomadas* and their interactions at school. Additionally, residents' ability to remain inside the city also offers them a certain degree of control by way of their proximity to other resources (Turner,

1968; Simone, 2008). Because they may work close to their home or work in multiple jobs, residents are often afforded more mobility and opportunities and therefore mediate some of the time they lose waiting and negotiating their access to spaces. For example, women often drop children off at school, then go to work, pick them up, make them lunch and then return to a different job in the afternoon. Thus in many ways, the temporal and spatial negotiations that residents must face on a daily basis give way to other opportunities and strategies that resident have by staying inside the city.

Chapter VII

Tucuman: Profiting from Precarious Spaces

INTRODUCTION

Casas tomadas are a lucrative business. The informal and clandestine character of these houses creates opportunities for financial gains for the people and organizations directly and indirectly involved with these spaces and the people who inhabit them. As highly contested spaces, *casas tomadas* are constantly being negotiated and appropriated by different groups and individuals. Various stake-holders or interest groups attempt to exercise different forms of control over the houses and their inhabitants, often using creative, coercive and sometimes violent means. *Casas tomadas* are liminal spaces; temporary houses and homes that are experienced as belonging to no one and to everyone (Wingate-Lewinson, et al., 2003; Bevan, 2011). As such, different people and groups impose multiple interests and demands on these spaces and the people and objects that inhabit them.

Owners of informal hotels and boarding houses, the managers they hire, individuals and groups who take over empty buildings and then profit off of renting or selling rooms, the residents who engage in business ventures inside the houses and around the neighborhood, are only a few examples of the various 'stake-holders' who profit in some way from the unstable and informal conditions of *casas tomadas*. The multiple and various ways that different groups and individuals employ and benefit from *casas tomadas* highlight the fragmented and individualized nature of these spaces. Residents carve out spaces for themselves and engage in and negotiate social

relationships, which allow them to have a certain degree of control over aspects of their living situation, while finding ways to avoid or tolerate other less desirable ones.

Social, economic and spatial marginalization often compel the urban poor to resolve basic livelihood needs on their own, with little state intervention and support (Bayat, 1997; Simone, 2004, 2008; Davis, 2006). Poor individuals and communities must find ways to ensure their ability to appropriate spaces and access resources that can offer some form of sustainable livelihood, even amidst highly tenuous and precarious conditions and realities. This often means that spaces, relationships and practices are entered into and managed in ways that offer immediate benefits and multiple potential opportunities; what Simone (2008) refers to as practices of 'convertibility', which allow urban residents to both "maximize their own maneuverability and the vulnerability of others" (138 and 143). What this essentially means is that "… all things and uses are convertible, and particularly people, their lives and bodies, can be converted into anything" (Simone, 2008: 139). Simone further explains:

> If legitimate production possibilities are limited…then existent materials of all kinds are to be appropriated…The key is to multiply the uses that can be made of documents, technologies, houses, vehicles, parts, infrastructure, whatever, and this means the ability to put different kinds of combinations of people with different skills, perspectives, linkages, identities, and aspirations (138-139).

Poor communities develop and produce opportunities out of instability and marginality, employing resources available to them in multiple ways. Understanding how the poor are able to multiply uses and meanings from housing and other materials and people helps to explain how they confront their often marginal and unstable condition. It also highlights the fragmented and precarious nature of the spaces they inhabit, as people

must both rely on and protect against the individuals and structures they live with and of which they are part (Simone, 2004).

Housing and home are important spaces and resources from which poor families and communities can benefit in multiple and creative ways (McCallum and Benjamin, 1985). The house and home as work-space to generate income, as a source of rental income or as an entry point into the urban economy are only a few examples of how marginalized families and communities use domestic spaces for profit-making means. Poor people's reliance on house and home in terms of its multiple functionality and significance illustrate how marginalized groups' access to housing is part of a much larger strategic network of things, bodies, relationships, places and services (Turner, 1968; McCallum and Benjamin, 1985; Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Coolen, 2006; Simone 2008).

The location of house and home is an important factor from which urban residents are able to "maximize [their] vulnerability" (Turner, 1968; Simone, 2008) through more immediate access to urban resources, materials and services. For many urban residents proximity to the city center offers more possibilities and opportunities in the form of social, spatial and material benefits. In Turner's (1968) discussion on the functionality of housing for the poor, he emphasizes the importance of location, arguing that for residents to be able to "maximize their opportunities" they must live in close proximity to jobs (356). Many of the residents of *casas tomadas* who I interviewed explained that despite their housing situation, they remained in the city because of the many opportunities, services and resources available to them. Living outside the city center in the

Metropolitan area meant long distances, poor access to resources, and high transportation costs. In addition, many residents of *casas tomadas* said living outside of the city meant increased insecurity and violence.

Henny Coolen's (2006) ecological approach to dwelling is particularly pertinent to a discussion on the multiple uses and meanings of home. In his approach, dwelling is understood as an integral part of the environment, serving many different functions; "shelter, privacy, security, control and status" (186). Additionally, functional meanings are ascribed to objects of home through people's needs, intentions and their social interactions. In other words, meanings of objects are neither fixed nor exclusive. Instead, the meanings and uses of a particular thing or object can change "in light of the situation in which [a person] is placed" (187).

Finally, access theory also helps to offer a framework from which to explore how residents inside *casas tomadas* enter into and negotiate their relationships in order to secure and benefit from the opportunities, objects and services available inside the houses. Relevant to this empirical research is Ribot and Peluso's (2003) discussion of power as one that is dynamic and fluid. Thus, just as meanings and uses of things and objects may change over time, those who have power and control over resident's access may change as well. In this sense, residents are keenly aware of the transience of their housing situation and are often invested in maintaining the fragile social order because of the specific benefits that they receive.

Drawing on Simone's (2008) concept of "convertibility", Coolen's (2006) ecological approach to dwelling, and Ribot and Peluso's access theory (2003), this

chapter presents and examines the various ways that residents, outside individuals and institutions profit and benefit from *casas tomadas*. The notion of convertibility offers a conceptual framework that takes into account the multiple and diverse ways that individuals and groups try to benefit from the tenuous conditions in which they live. Further, both Simone and Coolen's approaches offer a more "integrative [and ecological] approach to the physical, [social], psychological and economic dimensions" of house and home (Coolen, 2006: 185).

Exploring the material and social gains that individuals and groups receive from *casas tomadas* I consider the following research questions: How do different individuals and interest groups financially and socially profit from *casas tomadas*? How do these maximizing strategies of convertibility and the meanings and uses assigned to urban resources impact individuals and communities involved? I respond to these questions through an examination of the multiple ways that residents, outside individuals and interest groups financially and socially make claims on *casas tomadas* and the people who inhabit them. Focusing on the networks and strategies of different actors and interest groups, I contend that *casas tomadas*—as a contested spatial resource—offer multiple and diverse benefits and opportunities that impact residents in potentially stabilizing and destabilizing ways.

In the following pages I present and discuss different strategies and practices that individuals and groups employ, which allow them to profit and/or benefit from *casas tomadas*. Focusing on *Tucuman*, an informal hotel in the heart of Abasto (Fig. 7.1), I describe how practices and effects of competing interests on contested spaces unfold.

Later, I further examine other strategies, materials and relationships in these contested spaces and resident's vulnerability amidst attempts to address immediate needs and interests.

TUCUMAN

I first visited *Tucuman* in September to interview Gloria, a woman who I had met during one of the first meetings I attended at CIBA. When I arrived to the hotel, two policemen were arresting two boys outside the doorway for allegedly stealing cell phones. The boys either lived in *Tucuman* or used it to stash their goods or as a place to hide after a job. This was a common practice among some residents of *casas tomadas* and their friends involved in these activities. When Gloria opened the door I slipped past the four men into the house as if nothing were happening. We walked down a long, dark hallway to Gloria's room. Gloria lived in a small bedroom that was full of her belongings. She was proud of her possessions and what she had accomplished since arriving to Buenos Aires. Gloria's personal story and her account of how *Tucuman* became a *casa tomada* was similar to that of many of the residents and houses working with CIBA:

Gloria

> … I finally ended up living here. I got a room here because I knew the manager at the time. He was always really good to me. He told me, "But *Negra*[51], this place is for students", but I moved in anyway. When I moved in, the rooms shined, everything was very clean. Then there was a second round, and the hotel changed hands. The owner didn't pay the manager so he left and no one cleaned and here we are today. The owner had many fines, he wasn't supposed to rent

[51] In this context, "*negra*" is used as a term of endearment between friends

> the rooms, but he did anyway. I didn't know any of this. The manager would give me receipts but they were false. We used to pay $300, $380 pesos and then it went up to $480 pesos, but last year we stopped paying. Now the owner wants to sell the building, he wants to evict us so he can sell it.

The entrance to *Tucuman* was easy to miss. It was a small door off to the side of a brick colored building that is next to a multi-level parking lot. Once inside the hotel there is a dark, narrow hallway, with bedrooms lined up on the right with thin wooden doors that are painted bright neon green, yellow and blue. Despite the bright colors, the house felt damp and dark. Instead of offering a sense of comfort or just being cheerfully tacky, the bright colored paint seemed to be trying to cover up something dark and gloomy. The rooms were probably the smallest of all the houses I visited. They had low ceilings and small windows that faced the dark hallway, allowing for some ventilation but nothing else. The kitchen was bigger, with two ovens and a large sink. The metal grills to the burners had been stolen, making it difficult to cook. When I visited the first time, there was a large plastic garbage bag in the kitchen that sat fat and full in the corner of the room waiting for one of the residents to finally give in and take it out.

Figure 7.1: Tucuman

Source: Munoz 2009

Next to the kitchen there were separate men and women's bathrooms, with four or five small stalls in each one. The stench of urine was strong and acrid, especially in the men's bathroom. The stall doors are also painted neon yellow, deep blue and green. In the women's bathroom some of the stalls had locks on them, having been claimed by some of the women so they didn't have to share with other residents and they could keep them clean for themselves and their family. Gloria explained that at night when some of the young men would have friends over, the next morning the bathroom would be filthy, with garbage around the floor and toilets unflushed. There were large mirrors that were broken and stained and the sinks and showers leaked.

Many of the residents were young single men from Peru, but there were also Argentine women and their young children. An older Argentine woman sold beer and other random goods from inside the hotel to make money. I was told that she generally sold her products to the men and women living inside *Tucuman* as well as to other

residents from around the neighborhood. In all of the *casas tomadas* that I was able to work with, there were always residents who used their rooms and their close proximity to a relatively large population to sell goods like beer, soft drinks and other food. Others also sold products like clothes, food, stolen electronics and drugs.

During the time I was in the field, I never became very familiar with *Tucuman* or its residents because the majority were not affiliated with CIBA. However, Gloria frequently went to the weekly meetings at CIBA, and was an important member of the organization. In September, she told Jorge that there were many empty rooms in the hotel, especially on the second floor. With some of CIBA's affiliated houses nearing eviction and no extra bedrooms in other houses to put residents once they were evicted, Jorge and the other executive members from CIBA saw *Tucuman* as an opportunity to place some of their resident members and gain control of the house.

Jorge and the other members calculated that *Tucuman* would be easy to enter because there were fewer residents, they were not organized, and the eviction case had been stalled in the courts. This meant that residents would not be evicted in the immediate future. Esteban was one person the members of CIBA seemed concerned about. He was an Argentinian man who was responsible for paying the house bills and who was in charge of utilities. He considered himself the unofficial manager of the hotel. Esteban was colluding with a woman who lived and worked next door to the hotel, and who provided everyone with electricity, gas and cable. When I interviewed her, Gloria told me that when the hotel started the eviction process, the owner disconnected all of the utilities, but someone else re-connected everything illegally.

> Gas, electricity… the manager goes around collecting money from everyone. But I pay our neighbor personally. She charges us for everything. We pay electricity and gas every two months. Electricity is $30 pesos and gas is $7 pesos, and cable is around $60 pesos a month. Now it is cheaper because more people have moved in.

Esteban's partnership with this woman allowed him to make extra money and to assume a role inside the house that gave him certain authority over the other residents. The neighbor, by providing important resources also benefitted financially. These practices employed by Esteban and the neighbor were common. In all of the houses, certain individuals were able to make a profit from paying utility bills. Individual residents put utilities in their name and then charged the other residents extra, arguing that they deserved a little more for their time and effort spent collecting money and paying bills. In other houses, residents would illegally access certain services through a neighbor or with the help of a serviceman who was willing to connect all the residents from a house for a one-time or monthly fee. In some of the houses, bills would be posted up on the wall so that families knew how much they owed. In others, individuals assumed responsibility to collect money from each of the rooms and pay the bills, keeping a little money for their efforts.

Some residents, when they could get away with it, did not pay utilities; they would say they did not have any money or simply ignore other house member's pleas to contribute their part to the bills. However, usually all of the residents were willing to pay for services and utilities, a social norm that each enforced due in part to their sheer

reliance on these basic services and a sense of justice that often defined what was tolerated or not in each house. In most cases, residents were also willing to pay someone a little extra, in part because it was accepted that residents find ways to profit from anything they could and also to secure their own use. How much extra was generally regulated by what the residents were willing to tolerate. If an individual started to charge what residents thought was too much, they would complain and threaten not to pay.

For example, in *Gardel* all of the residents paid $15 pesos a month to a neighbor for access to cable. When the neighbor tried to increase the payment to $20 pesos a month the residents protested until he lowered it back to $15 pesos. In the case of *Tucuman*, residents tolerated Esteban because he offered them a certain stability and social order; furthermore, his so-called authority also meant that he was responsible for fixing any problems that might arise with the building and the utilities. This saved the other residents a lot of time and conflicts with each other, making cohabitation easier in the long run.

CIBA's entrance into *Tucuman* meant that the current social contract established in the house would be threatened. Those most at risk of losing what benefits and privileges they had access to, would most certainly oppose and challenge CIBA's presence in the building. The following is a description of CIBA's attempt to clandestinely place some of their members in *Tucuman* and what happened during and after the event. I was able to witness some of the immediate effects on the social order and dynamics of the house and how individuals vied to benefit from changes and restore their authority once CIBA's members had moved in.

CLAIMING CONTESTED SPACES

When I first heard the coordinating members of CIBA discussing their plan to take over the empty rooms in *Tucuman* I was surprised at how risky the operation seemed to be. After all, I thought, what can anyone say if a group of people moves into empty rooms? Why is it a problem that they move in, if there are rooms that are not being used? Jorge however, was concerned about the police charging the residents with illegal entry, the multiple interests at stake, and the power struggles that could ensue among the residents in the hotel. Regardless of the risks, *Tucuman*'s unstable situation and lack of cohesiveness, together with Gloria as their contact inside the building offered CIBA an opportunity to gain access to the house. This would allow CIBA to secure rooms for members who would be evicted in the near future and would give them more of a presence inside the house, compelling other residents to join CIBA's ranks, and providing extra revenue to the organization. The following describes CIBA's operation to place some of their members into *Tucuman* and the events that unfolded in the immediate aftermath.

Field notes October 2, 2009

This evening I went to a meeting at CIBA regarding *Tucuman*. CIBA wants to put some people into some of the empty rooms on the second floor. Two men arrived who are currently living in a hotel where the owner keeps raising the rent. One of the men explained, "The prices are going up to the point that I have to decide whether to buy food or pay the rent." Jorge is offering them a room in *Tucuman*.

Some of the people from *Tucuman* are working with CIBA but not everyone. Nevertheless, CIBA wants to put people in the other rooms, in part because there are empty rooms that people need, and also to have more allies in the hotel. During the meeting Jorge tried to explain the situation to the two men, who seemingly have no

experience with *casas tomadas*. Gloria was also there and she took advantage of the occasion to complain about all the problems and people in the hotel. I thought this was good because I didn't think that Jorge was giving the full picture to the men.

Field notes October 9, 2009

At the coordinating meeting this week they started discussing how they plan to put the people into some of the bedrooms in *Tucuman*. There are two older men, a young couple and their two year old, and some of the families from *Zelaya*, which is scheduled for eviction in two weeks. Jorge has decided that they will move into Tucuman on Monday morning at 4am before anyone is awake.

Arte, Jorge and Juan and a couple of other members are talking about the material of the door to the second floor to see if they will need to break it down or if they can force it open without destroying anything. They told everyone to bring a padlock so that once they choose a bedroom they can close the doors immediately and start using the space. One of CIBA's objectives is to be able to control one of the stories in the hotel. If CIBA can put their people in, then they can better control the hotel and also use it for others who need a place to live.

I was able to witness the operation, watching from a street corner as events unfolded. The following account is based on my field notes from October 24, 2009, the day the operation took place.

Some of the coordinating members from CIBA and the residents who were planning to move into *Tucuman* all met at *Zelaya* in the early morning hours, another *casa tomada* that was two blocks away from *Tucuman*. On my way there, I ran into the young Peruvian couple from Peru. The husband was carrying a mattress and a bag full of their belongings. Behind him his wife carried their young child who was fast asleep in

her arms. In all, there were four families from *Zelaya*, two men from another hotel and the young couple and their child.

The instructions were for the people to go four at a time so that they didn't look so conspicuous in the street, each with a "guide" from CIBA, who was in charge of leading the families inside. If anyone inside *Tucuman* asked them who they were, they were to say that they had bought a room from a woman named Alicia who used to live there. If the police came, they were supposed to say that they had rented rooms from Alicia and show a false contract that CIBA had written up.

Jorge, another woman and I left first and walked to a corner opposite the hotel and waited. If the police approached us, we were supposed to say that we were friends hanging out after partying all night. From the corner we watched everyone carry their belongings and silently walk into the hotel. Arte led the long lines of families moving stealthy down the street. They quickly entered the building and shut the door. After about ten minutes the four "guides" came out, one passed by us and said that someone had called the police and continued walking back to CIBA. Arte stayed inside for a minute but then we saw him leave and walk the other way.

Two minutes later the police arrived. The plan was that if the police came Gloria was going to deal with them, and she did. All of a sudden we saw two men from inside talking to the policemen and Gloria in the doorway screaming. She yelled and howled, and anytime someone else started to shout, she would just shout louder.

Jorge started to get worried so we walked back to *Anchorena* while Gloria was still yelling. After we arrived we waited another five minutes and then Jorge called

Yolanda (one of the women who moved in), who said that everything was under control and that they had negotiated with the other residents and had all arrived at some agreement. Yolanda told us that once the people accepted that these new families were occupying rooms there was a total frenzy, with the other residents taking over all the other empty rooms in the hotel. It seemed that once the residents saw families taking rooms over, they also saw the opportunities of claiming other rooms, either by moving in to them or later by renting or selling it to someone else. In other words, CIBA's entrance into to *Tucuman* led to a lapse in the social contract of the house, allowing other families to claim spaces that previously had been understood as off limits.

When CIBA clandestinely put their members into *Tucuman*, it initially disrupted the delicate social contract of the house. Esteban immediately tried to exercise his authority over the new residents. About two weeks after the families moved in, we heard that Esteban was telling everyone they had to pay $51.50 pesos for utilities. When I visited the house to interview Fabiola (Fig. 7.2), a young Peruvian woman who had only recently moved to Buenos Aires, I was able to witness how Esteban tried to exercise his power and control by pressuring Fabiola to pay and the manner in which Fabiola resisted.

Field Notes November 10, 2009

Esteban stopped Fabiola and I as we were walking to the door with a "hey, hey, hey…" He said that he needed to talk to her about the bills for the house and said that everyone from the second floor owed $51.50 for gas and electricity. Fabiola said that before they paid they wanted to see a receipt. Esteban said that he didn't have a receipt because he is a tenant like everyone else. Fabiola said that it didn't seem fair they had to pay so much since they had just moved in a week or two before. Esteban started to go on and on about how he was the one that made sure that everything got paid and fixed and

that the Peruvians never wanted to pay their share of the services, but that when there was a problem they wanted him to fix the situation. He told Fabiola that she needed to pay him immediately. Fabiola reminded him that he had told her on another occasion that she had until the 14th of the month to pay. Esteban became agitated and said that he wasn't expecting them to wait until the last minute, because if he didn't pay by the 15th then the electricity would be turned off.

The exchange between Fabiola and Esteban illustrates his attempt to assert his position and establish certain boundaries and conditions for the new members. Interestingly Esteban positioned himself on the one hand, as a tenant, "like everyone else" and on the other he tried to impose his authority over Fabiola. Esteban could not legally challenge the presence of these new families, yet he also had some leverage because he paid the utilities. Demanding money from the new residents would potentially allow him to reassert his authority and maintain his position and financially profit from the presence of these new families. At the same time, claiming to be like everyone else also protected him from being perceived as having too much authority over the other tenants and as taking advantage of them.

Figure 7.2: Fabiola in Tucuman

Source: Munoz 2009

On the same evening after Esteban's encounter with Fabiola, he went to CIBA to talk to Jorge about the money that he claimed all of the residents owed him. Jorge repeated what Fabiola and the other members had already said, asking Esteban if he had a copy of the receipt. Esteban said no and Jorge answered, "Well, we don't operate like that." By going to CIBA to talk to Jorge directly I believe Esteban identified with Jorge, assuming that both of them had similar goals and interests in terms of exploiting and using the residents of *Tucuman*.

CIBA's entry into the house and the way in which residents tried to also take advantage of this event illustrate how individuals and groups find ways to benefit from and gain and maintain control over the spaces and the residents who inhabit them. These routine practices also create a certain order or status quo in terms of residents' and other's

ability to anticipate and control strategies and their outcomes inside *casas tomadas*. When new residents from CIBA moved into *Tucuman*, the older residents immediately took over other rooms, in order to take advantage of what could be seen as a momentary lapse in the social contract of the hotel. The new residents eventually began to pay Esteban their monthly part of the utilities in order to avoid further conflict and in order to ensure their access to services.

Tucuman was evicted on July 8, 2010 during the middle of winter. The police barricaded the street and entered the house without warning, ordering the families to take their things and put them in two moving trucks that were waiting outside.[52] In August of 2012 I returned to see what had happened to the building. From the street it looked the same as it had three years earlier, only now the door was bolted shut and no one lived there.

Tucuman is only one example of how various individuals, residents and organizations use these informal spaces for their own profit and benefit. CIBA's entry into *Tucuman* and the immediate reactions of the residents, offer insight into how people give meaning to the spaces, people and objects around them. At the same time, it highlights the delicate social order that guides these spaces and how although easily disrupted, residents and stake-holders quickly find ways to benefit or profit from a new situation and/or reconstitute their power and authority. In other words, these actors are able to quickly reassess the situation and see opportunities from a different perspective when necessary that allow them to benefit and profit from changing conditions (Ribot

[52] A video of the eviction can be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_FKSXNASWQ

and Peluso, 2003; Simone, 2004). The rest of this chapter continues to discuss other examples of how residents and other individuals and groups profit from other *casas tomadas* and the resources and people that make up this universe.

SELLING SPACES, GOODS AND SERVICES

Residents of *casas tomadas* use these spaces for profit in multiple ways. One of the most lucrative businesses in a *casa tomada* is the renting and selling of rooms. This is not only reserved to current residents of these spaces, but can include organized crime rings that break into buildings and then sell or rent out rooms to desperate and unsuspecting families. Fraudulent owners or managers will also try to rent or sell rooms to people looking for a place to live. Residents, who move out of a house, will often rent their room out or sell it to someone they know or to a random stranger. This space of social and material capital, although not officially theirs to rent or sell, offers some financial gains that may be put toward fixing up a new home or renting a room in a hotel.

In many of the *casas tomadas* I worked with, the renting and selling of rooms was particularly common due to the high volume of people moving in and out of the building. One of the people I interviewed complained that a family had moved out and sold a room for $2000 pesos (around $300 USD). Others talked about their own experiences buying and renting a room, only to find out that it belonged to "no one" and that they would soon be evicted. CIBA tried to control the selling and renting of rooms in houses that were affiliated with them. But the houses were always divided between those who worked with CIBA and those who resented their presence, in part because they limited individual profit and opportunities. I was able to witness an exchange between Rocio, who had gone

to collect the *cuota social* (CIBA's monthly quota) in *Gardel*, and another man who refused to pay, saying that he was renting the room from the "owner":

Field Notes April 10, 2009

When we got to one of the last rooms, a man opened the door and said that he wasn't going to pay anything because he was renting the room from the original owner… Rocio went off, saying that no one was the owner of the room and that he shouldn't be paying rent, because the room was not there so someone could make a profit. The man said that it was a friend of his who had given him the room, and Rocio said, "He is no friend if he is making you pay for a room that isn't his to rent out in the first place."

In a similar scenario in *Pasteur*, another house working with CIBA, one of the older residents was renting out two rooms on the first floor to two young families who worked as *cartoneros*[53] inside the city. Hernán was an older man in his sixties who had recently lost part of his foot to diabetes. He couldn't work and had a young wife and a small son about two years old. The first floor of *Pasteur*, where Hernán and these young families lived, was slated to be evicted in April or May of 2009. The eviction notice explicitly stated the address as 1A, so Jorge (from CIBA) and Hernán had devised a way to divide up the house so that on the day of eviction only Hernán and his family were evicted from "room" 1A. When the police and social worker left, Hernán moved to an empty room down the hall from where he had been evicted. He continued to rent out the rooms to the other residents, which allowed him some income. The young families agreed to the

53 *Cartoneros* refers to the individuals who pick up recycling around the city. Many *cartoneros* come in to the city daily and then return to the provinces late at night. Others stay in the city during the week, sleeping in the streets so that they can work until late at night when much of the trash and recycling is being organized and distributed. For research on *cartoneros* see Chronopoulis, 2006; Gorbán, 2006; Perelman and Boy, 2010; Sternberg, 2013.

conditions, perhaps relieved to have a place to live in the city instead of sleeping on the streets or returning to the *provincia* each night. Jorge and the other members of CIBA said nothing to Hernán about renting out rooms, perhaps because of his health situation and because he had been living in the house long before CIBA put some of their members there. These types of tacit relationships and social dynamics highlight how access, benefit and uses of spaces, people and things are highly individualized and based on circumstances particular to a specific time and place (Coolen, 2006).

In another situation that I present in a later chapter, a woman who had sold her room to a young family in *Zelaya* reappeared on the day of eviction to re-claim the room so that she could receive the subsidy. Holding her young eight -year-old children by the hand, the woman pushed and shoved in line so that she could speak to the police and social worker before the current resident had a chance to claim the room and receive the subsidy (Fig. 7.3). An example of how different people try to claim and profit in multiple ways from particular spaces, things and people inside *casas tomadas*, the woman was originally able to profit from selling her room to another family, and then returned to profit again by receiving the subsidy.

Figure 7.3: Woman argues for her right to the subsidy

Source: Munoz 2009

The examples included in this Chapter attempt to illustrate the different ways that residents try to financially benefit from their instability. On the one hand, residents' tenuous living conditions in contested spaces represent a tenuous and unstable reality. On the other, as the chapter demonstrates, residents find ways to take advantage and use these living conditions to their advantage. Other residents know they are being taken advantage from others, but will accept certain practices if and when they can also benefit in some way. Residents will collectively push back when a sense of justice is violated. As such, rules and practices are controlled by a collective sense of justice.

ILLICIT ACTIVITIES

Casas tomadas are micro communities that function autonomously inside houses and also in connection with the neighborhoods and spaces around them. This means that residents and others are able to profit from selling goods and services to the families and

neighbors with whom they live. As contested and liminal spaces, *casas tomadas* are often used to sell drugs and other illicit and illegal products. Dealers generally use *casas tomadas* to sell drugs to a broader population, using these "home" spaces to stash their supply, and often selling from these spaces, sometimes using younger residents as drug runners. Dealers are able to maintain their business inside *casas tomadas* because residents are too physically close and spatially interdependent to risk challenging or opposing these individuals and their activities. During one interview, Maria, an older woman who lived in *Gardel* with her partner, told me that there was a drug dealer in the building. When I asked her who it was she responded, "Oh no, I'm not going to tell you that, then everyone will say that Maria said so and so sells drugs." Maria was concerned that by naming the person to me, an outsider who could easily and anonymously identify the person once I left the building, she would be putting herself and her home-space at risk.

The selling of drugs was common practice in some of the more numerous houses where families lived in largely populated, spatially fragmented and socially divided spaces. The following is an excerpt from my field notes describing how dealers were able to spatially and socially use a *casa tomada* and surrounding street area to do their deals.

Field Notes: April 10, 2009
Rocio and I left *Gardel* at 12 midnight and we waited outside until her son came to pick her up and then I walked two blocks to my apartment. Outside the building there was a transvestite who doesn't live in *Gardel* but who sleeps outside on an old mattress in the street. I always see her there. Tonight she was dressed in a dirty bright pink shirt, tight

white pants, and she had a blond wig on. She was walking around and looked completely high. Suddenly she started whistling in front of *Gardel*. Some boys came out of the building and she went and got something from them. Waiting on the other side of the street were two tall, attractive, very well dressed men. The transvestite walked over to the mattress and lay down on it. Then the men approached her, took their purchase and walked back to a new sports car parked half a block away on Corrientes.

In another house on the corner of Corrientes and Acuña de Figueroa, the residents in the neighborhood had signed a petition to have the families evicted because of the drugs and petty theft they said came from the building. It was common knowledge that some of the residents and their friends used the building to hide in or escape to after robbing people in the street. The house had four different entrances, two of which were always open and easy to escape into. Other residents described to me how different individuals not only used *casas tomadas* to stash stolen goods, but also to sell them to the residents living inside.

Sonia

> There is a man who comes by with a big bag of full of things. He says $5 pesos, $10 pesos… I say no and he says, "they are good quality (*son finas*), they are brand names (*son de marca*)…" Other people also enter the building, they are well-known in the house, but they don't live here. They walk in and go to the end of the hall, they start up conversations and sometimes sleep on the patio and they start to sell things: "I have a television, who wants it? I have a DVD… whatever you want, ask me and I can bring it for you." Or sometimes they sell clothes, or other random things like baby perfume. I haven't been able to buy anything, just a toy for my son.

In some cases, individuals both stole and sold goods inside the same house. Rocio described what happened to her sister one evening when they were living in *Pueyrredón*.

Rocio

> One day when she didn't sleep in her room, they stole everything, the girl's clothes, the oven, everything. It was all the drug users, you know how there were users, right? Then they sold everything; my brother in law's running shoes, his cell phone, they even sold the oven. So one night my brother in law is walking upstairs and he sees his shoes on a boy walking with his mother and he says to the woman, "Those shoes are mine". "What?" she said, "They are mine" he says, "who gave them to you?" "Oh no" she responded, "so and so sold them to me" she said. Everyone knew, but they kept quiet… if they found out you said anything, they could get violent.

As I have already mentioned, other residents of *casas tomadas* earned money by selling beer, soft drinks or food to residents or in the streets around Abasto and the neighborhoods in which they lived. In another *casa tomada* that was next to a mega evangelical church, residents of the house sold flowers on the corner. In strange contrast to the run down, dirty and crowded character of the house, there were always white buckets full of sweet smelling and colorful carnations on the patio.

In another example of the way that residents profit from *casas tomadas,* women often offered to take over cleaning duties for other residents for a small fee. This allowed them to make some money and also stay at home and watch their children or grandchildren. Sometimes, collective organizing initiatives that CIBA promoted also helped some of the residents earn some extra money. In one instance in *Gardel*, two

women worked security at the entrance of the building in order to control some of the illicit activity and individuals coming and going. One woman would work a 12-hour night shift and the other would work during the day. For both of the women, who were unemployed at the time, it was a helpful source of income. It also gave residents who were unable to find employment a sense of importance and responsibility to the rest of the house.

Many of these business endeavors and financial benefits mentioned here occurred inside *casas tomadas* because of and in reaction to the precarious nature of these spaces and the livelihood conditions of the inhabitants. Residents try to minimize risk by employing strategies from which they can benefit from the spatial conditions and social realities in which they find themselves (Simone, 2008). In other words, residents engage in strategies and endeavors that allow them to fill gaps and address routine problems that they are forced to resolve with the few resources to which they have access. These practices and strategies reflect the temporal and spatial needs and realities of the residents of *casas tomadas*. Residents find multiple and diverse ways to use and benefit from spaces, people and objects both inside houses and around the neighborhood where they live.

GUARANTEEING THE *GARANTÍA*

Examples of how different people and groups profit from informal and unstable spaces and livelihoods are also found among individuals and institutions outside the immediate realm of *casas tomadas* and informal housing. When poor urban residents attempt to leave the universe of informal housing they must find a *garantía;* another

lucrative business in which people use their own houses and homes to make a profit off of the desperation of families trying to remain in the city. One of the principal requirements for renting a house or apartment in Buenos Aires is the *garantía*, property that is used as a form of security deposit. In practice, this means that an important part of the urban population trying to remain inside Buenos Aires' city limits are denied access to formal housing options inside the city, simply because they do not have the financial or social capital to provide the *garantía*. As a result, individuals and businesses are able to profit from poor families who are trying to move out of the informal housing market. One of these families was that of Julio Muñoz.

Julio

Julio was a man in his early sixties who had worked as an accountant in Peru, but had followed his oldest daughter to Buenos Aires so that his younger daughter could go to University "because in Peru it was too expensive". Julio was one of the main coordinators in CIBA, having joined when he and his family were still living in a *casa tomada* from which they were eventually evicted. He was a serious and proud man who, with help from his two daughters and his wife, was able to rent a one-bedroom apartment off of *Rivadavia*[54] that he shared with his wife, their two daughters and his grandson.

Field Notes: Thursday, May 14, 2009

Julio explained that they were able to rent the apartment because the real estate agent offered them the possibility to buy the *garantía* directly from her. Julio didn't know if this was legal, or what name the *garantía* was under. He told me he thought that maybe the real estate agent had financially benefitted from this transaction, but he said

[54] Rivadavia is a main avenue that cuts through the center of the city. Many people explained to me that it is the avenue that historically symbolized the division between the richer northern neighborhoods from the poorer southern areas of the city.

that he had no way of knowing. Julio told me what I had heard from other people trying to find a place to live; sometimes when you are looking through the newspaper and there is an advertisement to rent an apartment, it is actually someone offering to "rent" their *garantía* for a specific amount of money. I don't know how much Julio paid for the *garantía*, but he said that in total he paid around $4000 pesos ($720 USD) for: the *garantía*, two months' rent, and other fees[55] before they had even moved in to their apartment. Julio also told me that they had to sign a two-year contract in which, although they started out paying $1500 pesos ($270 USD) a month, the rent increased by $100 pesos ($18 USD) every six months.

At the time of my research I calculated that Julio and his family were paying close to what I paid for my apartment which was much bigger than theirs and which I was able to obtain with very few required documents and a down payment of one month's rent.[56]

Luisa

Luisa, who worked as a nurse and who was dating one of the executive members of CIBA, had also managed to rent an apartment after being evicted from a *casa tomada* a year earlier. One day when she invited me to her apartment I asked her if she had been able to rent the apartment when it was so hard to get a *garantía.* Luisa explained that when she had been ready to move into an apartment with her three children, she had found a woman with a *garantía* and had put down $350 pesos ($65 USD) to hold the apartment. Then she found out that the woman had "rented" or "sold" her *garantía* to many different people and so it wasn't valid.[57]

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[55] Julio also mentioned that they had the option of getting a loan but the interest rate is very high.

[56] There is an important market of furnished apartments that are available to foreigners from Europe and the United States and other "developed" countries. The prices are in dollars and are geared toward tourists visiting Argentina for a few weeks to a few months.

[57] The *garantía* cannot be used multiple times.

Fortunately, she was able to find another guarantor and finally rented the apartment where she lived when I met her. She said that it had been very difficult for her to find an apartment because no one wanted to rent to a woman with three children who were 22, 16 and 14. Luisa paid approximately $1200 pesos ($216 USD) a month for a one-bedroom apartment. Her children slept on bunk beds in the living room and Luisa slept in the bedroom with her boyfriend. The kitchen was a long narrow corridor with a small table that allowed for two to eat, and there was a small bathroom for the five of them.

Julio and Luisa' efforts to move out of *casas tomadas* and the universe of informal housing meant that they were forced to pay for the *garantía,* adding to the already high cost of moving into an apartment. The *garantía* is simply another example of the institutionalized structures in place that continue to marginalize and exclude the poor from living in Buenos Aires. It also demonstrates how individuals profit from people's struggle to remain inside the city. Even when some poor families are able to move out of the ranks of those living in informal housing, they end up paying a high price. Lack of legislation and poor housing policies mean that poor families struggling to move into more comfortable and stable housing options are bound to ventures and interests of individuals and businesses eager to financially profit from Buenos Aires' urban poor and their struggle to stay in the city, as in the case of Sonia.

Since being evicted from a *casa tomada* and moving to the border of the city with her family two years ago, Sonia and her family have moved twice. She explained that the owners kept raising their rent from one month to the next. She told me that in the last

place they lived, which was run down and small, they had fixed a lot of things inside the house. Then one day the owner came and said that she wanted them to pay an additional $100 pesos a month in rent. They explained that they had added many things to the house and asked if it was possible to have the rent reduced instead. The owner said no. When Sonia and her family moved out they destroyed all of the repairs and additions, including a large sink that they had installed in the back of the house for laundry.

Poor families' attempts to move out of informal housing into a more stable home situation are limited and even denied by conflicting interests geared to exploit the precarious and informal situation of the urban poor in Buenos Aires. Even when poor families are able to move into the formal housing sector, this does not guarantee they will be able to remain there or that it offers more stability in the long run. As Sonia's situation illustrates, poor people's attempts at creating a stable "home" space for themselves and their family continues to be undermined by other private interests and poor government legislation, even when they are able to move into the formal housing sector.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights the importance of housing and home for poor people in ways that radically differ and surpass more conventional, middle class conceptualizations of meanings and uses of house and home. Instead, I have discussed the multiple ways that different actors and "stake-holders" lay claim to *casas tomadas* in order to financially and socially benefit from these highly vulnerable and precarious spaces and livelihoods. Residents and other actors—hotel owners, neighbors, organizations, real

estate agents and others—essentially profit from these domestic spaces and livelihoods. In this context and drawing on Simone's (2008) discussion on convertibility and the household, as well as Coolen's (2006) ecological approach to dwelling, these domestic spaces and their numerous elements and people are part of complex sets of relationships, representative of a collective dynamic and set of collective rules and social codes. These spaces and livelihood conditions should not be understood as autonomous or limited to the internal dynamic of each of these houses. Instead, the internal dynamic of *casas tomadas* are part of a much larger urban reality that includes numerous other spaces and realities of the urban environment. Finally, the precarious conditions of these spaces give meaning to a particular social order that is often being reinvented and reinterpreted by different stake holders. Thus, uses and meanings attributed to 'resources' (objects, people and spaces) inside *casas tomadas* are part of a more complex set of rules and practices representative of a delicate social order.

The ecological approach presented by Coolen (2006) and similarly, Simone's (2008) notion of convertibility, illuminate the mutually collective and fragmented conditions of housing in highly unstable and precarious environments. Residents of *casas tomadas* find ways to profit from their condition while controlling and limiting their vulnerability through social rules and a sense of justice respected and employed by residents in order to maintain some sense of order and stability despite extreme uncertainty.

Who and how one is able to profit from *casas tomadas* is largely part of both an individualized and collective rationale and idea of justice that gives a broader sense of

order and meaning to the dynamic network of relationships and interactions that characterize these spaces and resident's livelihoods (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Largely aware of their own vulnerability as well as opportunities to benefit from certain situations and negotiations, what residents are willing to tolerate and what they contest is largely based on a sort of cost-benefit analysis; residents are willing to accept certain practices because of the perceived reciprocity or return they receive. Essentially, residents enter into certain relationships with those who are able to guarantee them a certain degree of stability in their ability to benefit from basic resources, like utilities and other goods and services. Within a certain collective understanding of what is fair, residents are willing to tolerate and compromise certain things for others. As Coolen's approach argues, meaning is granted to certain objects and resources that are reinforced and/or contested through the relationships and networks created in connection to them (Coolen, 2006). With few options, although residents know they are being taken advantage of, if they perceive a specific return or benefit they may simply accept or actively choose to enter into that particular relationship and negotiation.

CHAPTER VIII

Corrientes 3050: Anatomy of Waiting for Eviction

"The future is uncertain, but the end is always near." Jim Morrison

INTRODUCTION

Few scholars have studied the eviction process and its numerous effects on the poor (Desmond, 2012). Fewer yet, have written on what occurs after a tenant is served with an eviction notice but before the actual eviction, with most studies focusing on the moment after the fact (Du Plessis, 2011; Desmond, 2012). This seems logical because in the US and other places around the world, the eviction process usually moves quite quickly and efficiently. In Buenos Aires, however, the long process of waiting for eviction is a period of great instability and uncertainty, exacerbated by the fact that so many families remain in the houses until the day of eviction. As a result, the act of waiting for eviction affects all aspects of residents' daily lives and their relationships and interactions.[58] Residents' decision making processes, how they collaborate with other residents and with CIBA, and the anxiety that builds up among all of the families are only some examples of the way that waiting for eviction profoundly affects residents' lives and relationships.

Bourdieu's discussion of time is helpful in this context, in part because of its emphasis on power and more appropriately, powerlessness. Simply put, time is

[58] At the risk of being accused of overstating the impact of the eviction process on residents, I am not suggesting that the eviction process is constantly present in the minds of the residents of *casas tomadas,* but rather it moves in and out of the daily practices, experiences, relationships and interactions of the residents inside the houses.

experienced differently by those who are afforded some degree of control over how they use their time and those who do not, what Bourdieu (2000) describes as one's ability to anticipate future outcomes (Bourdieu, 2000: 223). The connection between time and power established by Bourdieu offers insight into the significance of relationships of control and power in determining how time is experienced and perceived.

In his book, *Patients of the State* (2012), Javier Auyero draws on Bourdieu (2000) to explore the effects of waiting on the underprivileged in their ordinary, often routine interactions with state agents. Focusing on those who wait to receive important resources and funds crucial to their and their families' livelihood, Auyero (2012) discusses how "usually long and sometimes endless waiting" creates a context of submissiveness and dependence amongst the poor in relation to the state (25). What is particularly compelling about Auyero's (2012) account of poor people's waiting is not only the amount of time and energy expended in the process, but also the chronic uncertainty that characterizes these routine practices. With no guarantee they will receive what they are waiting for, poor people wait for hours and days only to be told, "come back in a month and we'll see" (62).

Inside *casas tomadas,* residents also wait; they wait to use the bathroom, they wait to cook their food, and they wait months and years with varying uncertainty, confusion, hope and frustration—to be evicted. Residents remain in the houses until the day of eviction for different reasons; because they cannot find another place to live, or because they are trying to save money, or so that they can receive the housing subsidy. The housing subsidy is a monthly stipend that families being evicted from their homes

are able to receive for a period of six to ten months. Under the program, *Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle* (ASFC), the city government of Buenos Aires provides occupants of *casas tomadas* with the subsidy if they meet certain requirements. The first installment is given on the day of eviction. Later, families must provide a series of documents to continue receiving further installments. In order to be eligible for the subsidy residents must be counted in the census of the house, and therefore must be present before and on the day of eviction. Remaining in a *casa tomada,* therefore, becomes an important strategy for many residents so that they will receive the subsidy to put towards renting what is often another room in an informal hotel or boarding house.

This chapter focuses on the period of waiting for eviction and the effects on the relationships, interactions and strategies of residents of *casas tomadas,* CIBA and the State. I argue that despite organizational practices that advocate for residents' rights, and government programs that offer some financial aid, they also further undercut residents' already precarious housing situation. I begin by framing my case study through a discussion of the practical and symbolic significance of 'time' and 'waiting' as a destabilizing factor for residents living in *casas tomadas* and awaiting eviction. I highlight how "eviction time" (Harms, 2013) produces a particular experience in which relationships and strategies are closely bound to changing perceptions, uncertainty and confusion about the present and the future. Later, specifically focusing on the eviction process of *Corrientes 3050*, I explore the changing relationships, heightened tensions and increasing instability that characterize residents' experiences of waiting for eviction.

CONTROLLING TIME

Earlier chapters of this research have focused on the impact of space, place and time on the relationships and interactions inside and outside of *casas tomadas.* As I discussed in Chapter VI, the temporal and spatial circumstances under which residents construct their lives and understanding of opportunities produce a particular reality that reflects residents' present and future conditions (Bourdieu, 2000). The experience of time is engendered in social relationships and societal structures that create a certain temporal order between present realities and future expectations (Bourdieu, 2000). As long as "social agents" are unable to anticipate "forth comings that present themselves in the very structure of the game," they lack the ability to control time and instead become submissive to it (Bourdieu, 2000). Similarly, Abdoumaliq Simone describes this condition as a 'state of emergency' in which:

> There is little time for accounting, no time to trace out the precise etiology of the crisis, for the sequence of causation is suspended in the urgency of a moment where recklessness may be as important as caution (Simone, 2004: 4).

Residents of *casas tomadas* awaiting eviction have little recourse to anticipate the future. Much like both Bourdieu and Simone's characterizations, with no clear knowledge of future outcomes, decisions are often made in the moment in which residents attempt to control the uncertainty of the present and the future. One way they do this is by agreeing to everything; residents spend considerable time and energy "making decisions" and participating in protests, organizations and routine events that may allow them to keep all options open as they wait to see what other alternatives may arise in the future.

In some ways, it is possible to view these practices of avoiding decisions as a form of controlling time. By remaining in the present, residents are able to maintain some sense of certainty and hopefulness about the future. In his study on squatters waiting for eviction in Thailand, Erik Harms (2013) explains,

> Eviction time becomes stranger still because residents know that the world they describe using this eternal present-tense will disappear, making everything familiar strange. But they do not know precisely when that tomorrow will come…This does not prevent dreaming utopian dreams but makes planning for the near future impossible (351).

This temporal uncertainty works as a form of social control (Auyero, 2012; Harms, 2013) that creates a sense of confusion about how to proceed. As I demonstrate in this chapter, residents of *casas tomadas* are aware that they have little control over their future as they wait to be evicted, but are confused and frustrated at their inability to do something about it. As a result, residents' relationship with CIBA may become increasingly problematic as the day of eviction draws near. Residents direct their anger, frustration and desperation at CIBA, blaming them for not resolving their housing situation. Yet, they also maintain a close relationship with the organization and anyone else who may offer to help them gain extra time to remain inside the *casa tomada.*

Simultaneously, residents often remain inside *casas tomadas* until the day of eviction in order to receive the subsidy. Remaining in the house to receive the subsidy is a strategy that offers residents some sense of control over the future as they wait for eviction. Simply put, the subsidy is essentially the carrot in front of the stick, offering something tangible to pursue and benefit from in a landscape of uncertainty, confusion and few guarantees or alternatives.

WAITING FOR EVICTION

Unlike many of the other *casas tomadas, Corrientes 3050* was a large, spacious boarding house in relatively good condition (Fig. 8.1). It was almost elegant and had been well kept, at least before it fell into eviction. Since it was spacious, each family was able to maintain a certain degree of privacy and there were two large, open patios where children could run around and play. The entrance was on the main avenue of Corrientes between Jean Jaures and Ecuador.

Figure 8.1: Corrientes 3050

Source: Jonathan Brookings 2009

The main door was thick, heavy and black and was easy to miss since it blended into the run-down character of the block where vacant houses sat next to hardware stores, Peruvian restaurants and boarded up buildings. At the end of the block however there was a tall upscale apartment building, and another block away stood the five-star Hyatt Hotel and the Abasto Shopping Mall.

Corrientes 3050 had been an informal hotel run by a man who was leasing the building from the owner and renting the rooms out to poor families, mostly immigrants from other parts of Argentina, Paraguay and Peru. One day the man stopped paying the owner, but continued to collect rent from all of the tenants in the building. After five months, the owner of the building sued the man. It was then that the tenants found out about the situation and stopped paying rent. In court the man formally returned the building to the owner and then disappeared, leaving the tenants to fend for themselves and never returning their money. Some of the residents had gone to CIBA to see what they could do, and CIBA managed to negotiate a deal with the owner that would allow the residents to remain in the house for four more months on the condition that they move out peacefully at the end of the allotted time.

I was able to witness much of the eviction process in *Corrientes 3050* because it was a short period that corresponded with the time I was doing my field research. Unlike some of the other houses in which years had passed since the eviction process had started, *Corrientes 3050* was a straightforward situation in which CIBA negotiated a specific period of time for the residents to stay in the house, to which everyone initially agreed.

The following pages are an account of the period of waiting for eviction from the moment of negotiation to when residents were supposed to vacate the premise. I explore the transformations that occurred inside *Corrientes 3050* during this period, focusing specifically on the strategies of the residents and CIBA at different stages of the eviction process, and their changing relationships and interactions as the day of eviction drew near.

During this period, according to the informal census taken by CIBA, around fifty families lived in *Corrientes 3050*. Among the Peruvian, Argentine and Bolivian families with young children, there was also a transgender community of approximately 15 individuals that had moved in after the house had fallen into eviction. Many of them worked as prostitutes in the evening. Although the size and internal spatial distribution of the building offered a greater sense of privacy and independence than in many of the other *casas tomadas*, the general conditions of the house contributed to tensions and divisions. The residents complained about the noise and ruckus on the weekends, and how no one wanted to contribute to the maintenance of the building. Moreover, tensions, conflicts, divisions and confusion about what to do, whom to follow, and who or what to believe were present and palpable throughout the months that residents waited for eviction.

My first encounter with *Corrientes 3050* was when I accompanied Jorge and other members from CIBA to discuss the agreement they had negotiated with the owner of the house. We met with a group of residents in the large, spacious foyer at the top of the steps on the second floor. CIBA explained the situation to the residents and asked them to vote in favor or against the agreement with the owner. The following is my account of the meeting that took place at *Corrientes 3050* and my initial impressions of the physical and social environment.

Field Notes: May 8, 2009

[In the evening] we went to *Corrientes 3050*. The structure is beautiful! It is big and in relatively good condition, with wooden floors, tall ceilings, and a huge patio where children run around and play. The rooms look spacious and it doesn't seem like people

are living on top of one another like in some of the other houses. Spatially, it feels very different from the other houses I have visited so far. Yet the people seem to struggle with the same issues as in the other houses; for example, the residents can't shower with hot water because the water heater broke and some residents don't want to pay for a new one. According to the residents, there is a whole list of other structural and social problems that need to be fixed.

Jorge told the residents that they had reached an agreement with the owner of the property that would allow the families to remain in the hotel for four more months, as long as they were willing to move out by the end of that time. Jorge presented the situation and asked the families if they agreed. Everyone silently consented by raising their hands. I wondered if they were being sincere, or if they were just doing what they thought they should do in that moment.

Jorge said that given the circumstances and the time they had, the families should maybe think about investing the money from the subsidy into a housing cooperative or *círculo de ahorro*[59] that CIBA is trying to start. Arte[60] backed up Jorge by saying that this option offered a possibility of breaking the cycle of moving from one *casa tomada* to another. Based on their reactions, which were passive and noncommittal, it was hard to gauge whether the residents are really interested or not.

One man said that things were different now that they knew that they had four months to stay in the house. I thought this was interesting. What has changed now that they have a definitive date? Where will they go? How many people will think about investing in a cooperative right now, if they have to think about finding another place to live?

Despite the news that they had four months to remain in the house, the meeting was tense. One woman started yelling at another woman, and then others started yelling

[59] The *círculo de ahorro* was a group savings plan that CIBA started as an alternative to the cooperative option promoted by Ley 341 which had been stalled by the IVC due to lack of funding. The objective behind the *círculo de ahorro* was that individual families would collectively save money to eventually purchase a plot of land and construct houses.

[60] Arte was part of the coordinating committee of CIBA.

too, though I didn't understand why. Someone from CIBA referred to the house as a *casa tomada* and one of the residents got angry repeating, "this isn't a *casa tomada,* this isn't a *casa tomada"*. Later I asked Jorge about it. He said that residents from hotels don't see themselves as living in a *casa tomada,* which they associate with illegal activity and breaking and entering a vacant building.

Residents and CIBA seem to operate on different assumptions and understandings of the process that they are experiencing inside these houses. In retrospect, I believe that residents were disappointed with the deal that CIBA had made with the owner of the house, hoping instead that they would be able to remain in the house indefinitely. During my field research I repeatedly heard residents from all of the houses say that they hoped that CIBA or the State would offer them an indefinite solution to their problem with housing. Usually this meant purchasing the building or finding a way to maintain control over the building for a prolonged period of time.

In some ways CIBA contributed to these aspirations by discussing the many possible goals and objectives in their struggle for housing rights in the city. However, what was a form of political discourse that CIBA used to "enlighten" and politicize the residents was often interpreted very differently by the residents themselves. I am not suggesting CIBA intentionally created these expectations for the residents of Corrientes. However, it was clear that the residents anticipated or simply hoped that CIBA would be able to negotiate the possibility of them remaining in the house indefinitely. As Auyero and Swistun (2009) explain in their work *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*, residents in *Villa Inflamable* confront the present by anticipating the future, suggesting that residents are always very "involved in what they anticipate;

their expectations, furthermore, are shared, collective and socialized" (Auyero and Swistun, 2009: 111). The authors interpret residents' involvement as strategies that allow them to "actively structure uncertainty" even as they remain "powerless witnesses of the actions and words (or lack thereof) taken or said elsewhere" (Auyero and Swistun, 2009: 111). Like the residents of *Villa Inflamable*, the residents of *casas tomadas* engage in similar processes and strategies that allow them to alleviate and control to some degree their uncertainty and frustration as they wait for others to make decisions on their behalf and in many ways decide their fate.

ORGANIZING RESIDENTS OR RESIDENTS ORGANIZING?

A couple of weeks later I returned to *Corrientes 3050* to help CIBA with a survey regarding residents' interest in participating in a collective "solution" to the eviction. I had not seen most of the residents since the previous house meeting and I was curious about what they would say about organizing collectively to find a place to live. Although CIBA called it a survey (*una encuesta)*, they used it more as an opportunity to talk to residents and try to convince them that a collective strategy was a good solution to their housing problem. This made me nervous, because it meant that the rate of positive responses for the "survey" would be very high and would not accurately reflect residents' real opinions. As we spoke to residents, it also seemed that they were responding positively for reasons other than a genuine interest in the project. I thought that many people were saying what they calculated CIBA wanted to hear in the event that they might benefit from some future opportunity. Or perhaps they said they were interested

because it was easier than saying what they really thought. Perhaps they said yes so that CIBA would leave them alone so they could continue with whatever they were doing.

These initial visits were my first encounters with residents' practices and strategies to confront their housing situation. During these visits I also witnessed the complex relationships between CIBA and the residents in the houses. Jorge told everyone in *Corrientes 3050* that there would be a meeting that Wednesday to discuss a collective land purchase with the money from the subsidy. Despite their positive responses to the survey, no one from Corrientes went to the meeting. In my research notes from that time I discuss my inability to understand resident's actions, asking, "Why would so many people say they were interested in putting their money together and then not one go to the meeting to even explore this option?" (Field Notes: May 24, 2009).

Throughout my field research it was increasingly clear that residents' responses and participation were part of broader strategies and calculations that included keeping all options open. By agreeing to everything, residents could maintain a relationship with CIBA, which might ensure that the organization would continue to support and work with them. Therefore, if any opportunity arose, residents were in a situation in which they could benefit from whatever CIBA or anyone else offered. These examples support Auyero and Swistun's (2009) findings and illustrate how residents develop strategies that aid them in controlling the confusion and uncertainty of the present by attempting to anticipate the future.

Conversely, the goals of CIBA's struggle for housing in Buenos Aires are to empower the residents of the houses they are representing so that they organize

collectively inside and politically outside of the houses. During house and weekly meetings, Jorge and the other leaders try to challenge and empower residents of the houses by motivating them to collectively organize to address routine needs and problems, and to struggle for housing rights. Their objectives are not simple rhetoric, but rather part of an ideological approach that shapes and guides CIBA's struggle, and its organizational structure and methods. In these meetings, the residents of the houses would usually remain quiet and seemed to listen with frustration, tolerance and skepticism. As they often explained, residents were tired of trying to cooperate with one another and to collectively organize. Residents from all houses always complained that despite their attempts at organizing, "other" residents just wanted to be left alone and felt no responsibility to the rest of the house. In many of these meetings, it seemed obvious that the residents were hoping that CIBA would take care of the problem or give them a solution. In effect, the residents of *casas tomadas* "place their hopes" in what CIBA and the State will "do on their behalf" (Auyero and Swistun, 2009: 133). As a result, when the date of eviction draws closer, residents' anger and frustration are increasingly directed at CIBA, who they always perceive as not having done enough.

FRUSTRATED EXPECTATIONS, UNREALISTIC DEMANDS?

Despite the initial lack of interest in participating in a collective purchase of land by pooling their subsidy, a group of residents in *Corrientes 3050* did begin to look for a lot to purchase and build on. The goal was to find something in or outside of the city that they would be able to buy by pooling their share of the subsidy money together. Once they had found something, CIBA would negotiate with the city's welfare office so that

the families could receive the subsidy in a lump sum they could then put toward the purchase of land and development of the houses. The following is an excerpt from when I accompanied one of the members of CIBA to *Corrientes 3050* to find out how the families were getting along in their search for land.

Field Notes: July 7, 2009

Yesterday I went with Ignacio[61] to *Corrientes 3050* to see how the residents who are looking for land have fared so far. Since *Corrientes 3050* had four months to move out, Jorge thought that with the time they had, CIBA could help the families organize and use their subsidy to buy a piece of land together. This is the second or third meeting that they have had, and the move-out date is around the end of September.

There were only about four or five people at the meeting. One of them was Cecilia, who isn't even going to purchase land, because she doesn't have additional funds and has already moved into another hotel. She remains in Corrientes so that she can receive the subsidy when they are evicted. Adela, a Bolivian woman, has spent a lot of time looking for a place to live and seems like the only one really proactively doing something. Edsin, a man from Brazil, said that he had some contacts and places that he was going to check out, but that they still had not contacted him. Another man just stood there with a smirk on his face, and when Juan finally asked him if he had done anything, he said no and then soon left the meeting. Another man who is also supposedly interested in this initiative was also at the meeting but remained quiet. Later, a young woman arrived and gave a list of two plots close by, but she had no prices or phone numbers and one plot was very small. Throughout the entire meeting everyone, except for Adela and Edsin, just kind of looked at Juan in a kind of uncomfortable silence.

I kept wondering, what do they plan to do? Many of them have children, this means that it will be difficult to rent a room in a hotel, and if they can't live in another hotel, where will they go? A couple of them are intent on staying in the city, but if there

[61] Ignacio was another member of the coordinating committee who had started to work with CIBA around the time that I began my fieldwork.

is no place to rent, what will they do? I am confused about this level of passivity in a situation in which there are very few options. Wouldn't this make people more intent and active in finding a place to live?

After the meeting, I spoke to Adela who told me that there were rumors spreading around the house that the eviction wasn't going to happen in September because they had to receive some piece of paper first that still had not arrived. Others were complaining that CIBA should look for a place for them to live, asking; "What do we pay them for?" I'm not sure why they think that paying $20 pesos a month (US $5.00) means that CIBA is responsible for finding them a place to live. I am surprised how the rising sense of desperation and anger that residents feel is often directed at CIBA.

This excerpt illustrates the complex and nuanced strategies that residents engage in with CIBA. I believe that most of the residents who demonstrated some interest in looking for a plot of land were never fully convinced or committed to the endeavor. Instead, residents were willing to go through the motion in order to demonstrate to CIBA that they were interested and actively engaged in exploring options, in order to ensure CIBA's continuing support and interest in their welfare. This is not passive behavior, but rather can be qualified as active strategies that create some sense of control and maintain all options "open" as residents remain hopeful and try to anticipate future possibilities and outcomes. At the same time, I am not implying that residents are dishonest in their strategies and behavior. Residents' strategies very much reflect their understanding of their current and future situation. Residents genuinely hope that CIBA will assume the responsibility to find a housing solution for everyone. With few opportunities, residents work hard at maintaining their relationships with CIBA by going to weekly meetings,

participating in protests and hoping that so much work will ultimately pay off. When it does not and the day of eviction is set, residents feel that CIBA has betrayed them.

I spoke to Jorge about what I had experienced and my confusion about the meeting in Corrientes when I stopped by CIBA a couple of days later. He told me about a similar situation in which another house was nearing the date of eviction. CIBA was able to reach an agreement between the owner of the house, the government and the residents, which would allow them to stay in the house for one more year by paying the owner the entire subsidy of $4500 pesos ($450/month X 10).[62] It seemed like a good deal that would have offered residents the opportunity to remain in the house for an entire year for a sum that was much cheaper than renting a hotel. However, when they were close to the date of eviction, a rumor started that CIBA was going to keep all the money, and the deal fell through.

BLAMING CIBA

By August, the search for a plot of land had long been abandoned and another group inside Corrientes had found a different lawyer to represent them in court. This group of residents had made everyone pay $35 pesos ($6.00/US) each to the new lawyer, and threatened to kick anyone out who refused to pay. Many of the residents also started to openly blame CIBA for the situation they were in and were threatening the few families that were still working with CIBA at that time to either leave or pay the $35 pesos for the new lawyer.

[62] The amount of the subsidy has increased from $450 pesos (in 2007) to $1800 pesos (2013). What this means in purchasing power is unclear given the current financial situation in Argentina and the rates of inflation over the past three years.

Field Notes: August 5, 2009: At CIBA headquarters

At the weekly assembly someone from Corrientes told Jorge and the others that some of the residents have hired another lawyer. This is the first time CIBA has heard about this lawyer who claims that he can extend the time that the families have to stay in the house until December. Jorge responds that the case is done at this point and so anything the other lawyer says about taking the case back to court is false. I find it interesting that the people in the house have only recently hired a new lawyer. Why didn't they express their discontent with CIBA and hire him four months ago? Some of the residents originally working with CIBA, like "*La Abuela,*" have signed on with this new lawyer. *La Abuela* was one of the women who was going to look for land, however I think that since that project was unsuccessful, she has also signed on with this new lawyer in the hope that he can offer them something else. At some point in the meeting one of the residents said that the lawyer referred to the court case as a "*juicio penal*" or a criminal case, which is applied to cases where the people accused of breaking and entering a building. Jorge finally got frustrated saying, "What criminal case? This is a civil case!" (*¿Qué juicio penal? ¡Es un juicio civil!)*

As the date of eviction approached the tensions inside *Corrientes 3050* increased significantly. The hiring of a new lawyer who claimed he could prolong the period the residents could remain in the house only contributed to the frustration and distrust that had been building up collectively among the residents. Confusion, moments of hope and constant doubt regarding what and who to believe, and the options available, together with a sense of increasing uncertainty as the date of eviction arrived, infested the house and the social relationships. People took sides and created "others" on whom to blame their situation and direct their anger and desperation.

Field Notes: August 20, 2009

Today I asked Adela, the Bolivian woman from *Corrientes 3050* what is going on in the house. She said that the new lawyer has still not given information about the case, and according to Arte and Jorge he never will, because there is nothing that can be done. Adela seems pretty calm and collected for someone who still has not found where to live. When we were walking home after the meeting at CIBA, she told me that she keeps looking, but that no one wants to accept her because of her three year old. The hotels have become quite strict over the years and refuse anyone with children. At the same time, she said that the cost of rent is around $900 pesos, and that she is looking in the provinces because everything is cheaper. She told me that a room in the provinces costs $500 pesos. I can't help but think, "but it is still just a room."

Cecilia is also concerned with what is happening because although she is already renting a room in another hotel, she is worried that if the others manage to extend the contract for another 90 days then she is going to lose the possibility to receive the subsidy. She told me that they are already asking her when she plans to leave because some of the other people want to put a friend of theirs in the bedroom.[63] She also refused to pay the new lawyer, which means that the others might force her to leave, using the argument that she isn't supporting the house.

AUGUST: MONTH THREE

At the end of August, CIBA organized another meeting in *Corrientes 3050* to discuss the situation inside the house. At CIBA, some of the coordinators had begun to consider the possibility of resisting eviction, a strategy CIBA sometimes uses to either gain more time for the residents or to negotiate the subsidy with the city government. First however, they had to address the growing frustration and anger that residents were expressing.

[63] Residents put people in bedrooms when a house is going to be evicted so that they can receive the subsidy, even though they may have never resided in the house before eviction.

Field Notes: August 22, 2009

Last night I went with CIBA to *Corrientes 3050* for a house meeting. It has been almost four months since we had the original meeting in which the residents agreed to leave the house in September. In that meeting, everyone had silently consented to the agreement between CIBA and the owner. Jorge had suggested that the residents pool the subsidy money together in order to collectively purchase a plot of land, but nothing had come out of that plan. Recently, some of the residents from the house had hired a new lawyer who claimed he would be able to offer them more time in the house, since eviction was only a few weeks away.

After knocking on the door and calling all of the people to the lobby for the meeting, Jorge started to tell everyone that the lawyer they had hired was ripping them off. Edsin, the Brazilian man who had originally agreed to look for a place to live, yelled at Jorge and said that CIBA hadn't given them any solutions. Jorge kept repeating that there were no magical solutions. I realized even though CIBA's main objective is to fight for the residents of *casas tomadas* by giving them more time in the house and in the city, the residents think, or maybe just hope that CIBA will be able to resolve their housing problems, either by finding ways they can remain where they are indefinitely, or finding them another place to live.

This time, Jorge offered another option. He said that if they decided to resist the eviction that CIBA would support them. The residents explained that they only want a couple more months until December, so that their children can finish the school year. Jorge also suggested that they call the owner to ask him directly if they can have more time. He explained that the store on the first floor also belongs to the owners and their contract isn't up until March 2010, so they won't be able to sell the building until after that date anyway.

The eviction did not occur in September or in October. Little by little families and residents who had found a place to live began to move out, leaving behind empty rooms and the uncertainty of where they would end up next. Many of the immigrant

families with young children remained in the house. For these families with young children it was more difficult to find a room in a hotel or boarding house either because they had children or because they could not pay the price of rent. Others could not enroll their children in school since there was only one month left.

SEPTEMBER: MONTH FOUR

In early September I went to *Corrientes 3050* to do some short surveys for my research in which I asked residents basic questions about their housing situation and future plans. I felt a little uncomfortable because I knew that the residents associated me with CIBA, even though the questionnaires were for my own research. Many residents spoke very badly about CIBA, even those who had been going to weekly assemblies and participating in other events. I attributed this general reaction to the collective experience of waiting for eviction and the frustration and anger that residents needed to direct at someone.

Field Notes: September 2, 2009

Wednesday I went to *Corrientes 3050* to do some short surveys. It was a rainy day and I was kind of nervous about going because the house dynamic has been very tense since they have put a new lawyer and some of the people are blaming CIBA for having to leave the house. I started at Eduardo and Alejandra's room. At the housing meeting a couple of weeks ago, Eduardo was furious and kept pacing and saying very antagonistic things under his breath. At the end of the meeting he just left. I had spoken to them both before and I wasn't surprised at Eduardo's behavior. He is a big man with a very aggressive presence, but he also seems very vulnerable.

When I walked into the room, Eduardo was on the bed with a scowl on his face. I started the questions but Eduardo immediately got up and started to discuss the CIBA issue. Of course Eduardo associated me with CIBA and he had every right to, even

though at that moment I was not there doing anything with CIBA, and I said that many times, but it didn't matter to him. He kept threatening CIBA and saying how he would like to sue them. Other people I interviewed also spoke badly about CIBA, blaming them for the situation of having to leave in a few short weeks.

Of the twenty individuals who I surveyed in September, all said that they had looked for a housing alternative. Some had found a room in a hotel or in a boarding house. Others explained that they had some temporary or uncertain options for where they could go, when and if they were evicted. Many of the residents continued to operate in the context of leaving all options on the table, in which they satisfied a certain degree of urgency, but continued to anticipate other scenarios and "solutions" that might potentially arise. Not surprisingly, when I asked residents what their ideal housing situation would be, they all responded that they would like to be able rent an apartment in the city.

Field Notes: November 3, 2009

This evening I went with Arte and Julio to *Corrientes 3050* for a meeting to discuss the option of resisting the eviction, which should happen soon. Most of the people who live in the house did not show up. Only Elisa, Adela, and three or four other women were there. The rest stayed in their bedrooms or in other areas of the house. Arte and Julio tried to present the situation saying that CIBA is willing to resist the eviction with the rest of the residents, but that the majority had to agree to participate or leave before it happened. We left with the message that they needed to discuss the different options with the rest of the people in the house and then let us know what they planned to do. According to the people at the meeting, some of the families had already organized to move out or had already moved out. Others had said that they were planning on staying but they were not necessarily interested in resisting the eviction.

At one point in the conversation one of the women said to Adela and Elisa, "let's face it, you two don't have to worry about anything because you have been going to CIBA, everyone knows that I could never go because I had to work…" Arte quickly interrupted her and said, "it has nothing to do with that, we are here to protect the house…". The same woman also explained that she had found a place to live outside of the city because she didn't want her children to experience the eviction, but when she tried to sign up her kids for school in that area, they told her she would have to wait until next year because there is very little time left. She explained her situation in the city but they still refused to accept her children for this school year. This is why she was willing to resist the eviction, because she doesn't want her kids to miss more school.

This meeting and the woman's comment to Adela and Elisa highlight how residents of *casas tomadas* understand their participation and positionality in relationship to CIBA and other organizations and people supporting them. Instead of seeing themselves as equal and active and willing partners with CIBA, residents participate in public protests, special events and weekly meetings in order to receive CIBA's support in return.

At the same time, as I discuss in Chapter IV, CIBA and other organizations and individuals inadvertently reinforce this perception, even as they try to empower and promote residents to collectively organize inside the houses. Some of this comes simply from a level of interdependence in which CIBA needs residents to participate in protests and movements and often runs out of ways to keep residents engaged all the time. Unfortunately, as Auyero et al.'s, research (2009, 2012) demonstrates, social and political structures reinforce practices and relationships of power and control over the urban poor in Buenos Aires (also see: Nicholls, 2009). Poor people learn that in order to receive important resources they must behave accordingly (Auyero, 2012).

Field Notes: November 5, 2009

Thursday there was a meeting with the lawyers at *Corrientes 3050*. Roberto who is like the acting manager of the building, had called the owner's lawyer to see if they could come up with some kind of agreement to give them one more month in the house. They want more time because the children only have one more month of school before summer begins. I arrived with Arte, Luisa and Juan and we waited for the lawyers to arrive. The owner's lawyer, her assistant and a government official all met downstairs in the entrance of the building. They refused to come inside the house, so we had our meeting on the steps of the entrance, with the lawyers in the doorway. Since the entrance is immediately on Avenida Corrientes, it was very noisy and stuffy on the stairs. It also felt demeaning since they refused to come into the house because they were clearly scared of the residents. So we met in the stairway amidst the dust and noise of the buses and the traffic outside, with all the families and their children standing on the steps of the entrance and the lawyers below who stood by the door in case they had to escape. They were very well dressed in their suits and stood out from the residents who looked ragged and poor next to them.

The person from the district attorney's office said that the families had the option of going to homeless shelters, and said that she had already given them the address when some of the residents went to see her. Arte said that the shelters are separated for men and women, and if single mothers have boys that are older than ten, their sons must go to the men's shelters and cannot stay with the rest of their family.

The District Attorney said the shelters were an option for the children to remain in school for one more month. However the shelters have a specific schedule. Families can be there from six in the afternoon to six in the morning and then must remain in the streets for the rest of the day. I kept wondering, "with children in school, where will they do their homework? Where do they feed their children? Where do they take their things while they spend the day in the streets?" Many of these families have numerous children and so it isn't a matter of just dropping off the kids, it also involves ensuring that they have everything they need to spend the day in the street. Finally I thought, how can this

woman think this is a viable option? Later, one of the lawyers said to Arte that CIBA should be responsible for finding a place to live for the families. In the end, the lawyer and the District Attorney refused to change the date and gave the family until the 17th of November to leave the premises.

Afterwards we all met upstairs and Arte again presented the option of resisting the eviction. Most of the residents of the house were there. Everyone supported resisting the eviction, though I don't know if they sincerely agreed to it or if, under the circumstances they felt obligated, or that they were simply out of options. Regardless, CIBA is now going to start preparing to resist the eviction. Since they don't know when it will happen, Juan is going to move into one of the bedrooms that are now empty because some of the families have already left.

The meeting on the stairs with the district attorney and the lawyers illustrates the level of subordination that is created and aggravated by uneven power relationships and different actor's intentions and interests. The district attorney's suggestion that families move to shelters only highlights the lack of options provided by the state and how representatives are unable or simply unwilling to offer alternatives. Perhaps most compelling is how the district attorney used CIBA to take the responsibility off the state and transfer it to an organization that clearly does not have that authority or ability to offer residents another place to live. This type of tactic, whether spontaneous or planned, creates further turmoil and tension for the residents of *casas tomadas* who are both seeking solutions and options as they attempt to comprehend their situation and maneuver through all of the information they are receiving from various sources.

Elisa's story – Field Notes: November 16, 2009

Elisa went to the district attorney yesterday to ask about the eviction and to get more information. Elisa explained that at the district attorney's office they said that the

lawyer representing the house was planning on asking the owner's lawyer to give the residents a few more days in the house. The district attorney didn't know if it was going to work, but she said that she would be going to Corrientes. If she was alone that meant that the house had a few more days, but if she was with the police, that meant that the eviction would be that day.

Elisa explained that the woman also tried to talk her out of resisting the eviction, and said that CIBA was a violent group and that they were lying to the people in the house. The District Attorney said that she didn't understand why as mothers they would put their children in a situation like that and that in her experience she had seen most mothers use their children as shields. Elisa responded that she obviously had no interest whatsoever in exposing her children to that kind of violence, but without a place to live she had no other choice. The woman tried to suggest some places where she could go, insisting that there were other options. Elisa said there weren't, she said you don't know what it is like to walk around looking for a place to live and they immediately tell you no children, or the hotels that allow children are all full, or the rent is too expensive.

Similar to the meeting on the stairs a week earlier, the district attorney once again offered very little information to Elisa and instead transferred blame to the residents (specifically, mothers) and to CIBA. The district attorney's characterization of CIBA as violent liars and her suggestion that mothers use their children as shields also generalized blame and responsibility not only on Elisa and residents, but on the mothers of *casas tomadas*. The transfer of responsibility onto the residents themselves both liberates the state from resolving the conflict and also reinforces stereotypes surrounding the poor as irresponsible and violent. At the same time, the district attorney's words were also meant to create further conflict among residents and CIBA, a tactic to both control and further subordinate residents and disempower CIBA.

RESISTING EVICTION

The resistance occurred on November 16. Many CIBA members gathered at the house in the early evening. They blocked the doors and organized the residents of the house. The district attorney knew about the resistance and suspended the eviction, probably in order to avoid public disruptions that would draw attention and also block Corrientes.

Field Notes: November 17, 2009

I stayed at *Corrientes 3050* last night. Supposedly the eviction was going to be this morning and so CIBA and residents from the house had prepared to resist. We arrived in the evening and prepared the house in case the police arrived this morning. Two weeks ago they had told all the residents that they had until November 17th to leave. Last week however, someone from the house had gone to the district attorney's office and inadvertently told her that the house was going to resist the eviction, explaining that she did not want to participate, but she also didn't want to lose her chance to receive the subsidy.

THE RESISTANCE

I walked to Corrientes from CIBA with other members around 10:30 in the evening. Jorge and some of the other people arrived later after they had visited the other *casas tomadas* to ask the residents to be ready to come to Corrientes in the evening or in the early morning in case something happened. Elisa and some of the other families had made a huge pot of spaghetti so we all sat down to eat in the patio. Others were sitting around talking, drinking or smoking. The camera crew from a popular television program was there to film the eviction. When we sat down to eat everyone was talking and hanging out. It was a beautiful night. All of the kids were running around and playing and seemed to be really excited about having so many people in the house.

After eating and waiting for some of the other people to arrive in the house Jorge called everyone together into the foyer so that we could talk about a strategy for the

night. He said that a group of people would need to go up to the roof and that another group would have to go on the balcony. He said that the women should be on the balcony with the kids because the image is a much stronger one, while the men should be on the roof watching out that no one comes up from that direction. Jorge wanted one woman to go to the roof, but she started to complain that she didn't want to go on the roof, that the roof was for the men and the women could be on the balcony. They finally got it sorted out and everyone went off to their separate rooms to get ready for bed. The instructions were for everyone to be up by 5am, except for the kids who all slept in one of the interior bedrooms so that they could keep sleeping in the morning and in case the situation got violent.

Although not everyone participated or agreed with the resistance, throughout the night there was an energy and feeling of solidarity, especially among those who had willingly come to the house to participate. It was fun and exciting and scary at the same time and I had a better understanding of why many of the members of CIBA were eager and excited to resist the eviction. In the morning Elisa gave us coffee and bread and asked us if we were ok, and how we were getting along.

When it was clear that the police were not going to show up and that the eviction would not happen that day, we went out into the street to block Avenida Corrientes at Jean Jaures. There weren't that many of us and it was rush hour, but we stopped Corrientes. The police came to control the traffic, but basically left us alone. After blocking traffic for an hour and a half CIBA was able to get an audience with someone at the Welfare Office (*Ministerio de Promoción Social*).

In the end, the residents were able to remain in the house until the end of the school year when they left on their own accord.

Figure 8.2: Planning the Resistance

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 8.3: Dinner before the resistance to eviction

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 8.4: Members from other houses arrive to support the resistance

Source: Munoz 2009

Figure 8.5: Protesting on Corrientes

Source: Munoz 2009

CONCLUSION

The conflicts and contentious relationship that characterized residents' relationship with CIBA in the final months and weeks before eviction, shifted once residents were convinced that resisting eviction was the last option they had to extend the period of time they could remain in the house. Residents' relationship with CIBA is marked by time and attempts to control and anticipate present and future opportunities and strategies. Residents resent CIBA's presence and yet continue to depend on them in the case that they may offer a solution to their plight. In this way, residents attempt to control their temporal status, through relationships and activities that allow them to actively and strategically wait.

In many ways, resident's relationships with CIBA embody their temporal circumstances and the uncertainty of waiting for eviction. Residents rely on CIBA as a way to control an unknown future, anticipating or at least hoping that CIBA will be able to "resolve" their housing problem and help them avoid eviction. Focusing on CIBA and on CIBA's narratives of struggle and change, residents seem to believe they can avoid the eviction, even as they wait to be evicted. However, once it is looming and becomes increasingly real, residents' frustration and desperation is directed at CIBA for prolonging the uncertainty and confusion of an unknown future. During this period, residents scramble to find someone or something else to take CIBA's place, so that they can have more time and potential possibilities. Once it is clear that all possibilities have been exhausted, residents again look to CIBA to help them confront the future they have

avoided for so long. In this sense, CIBA both offers residents a sense of control over their situation and it also exacerbates the experience of waiting and loss of control.

The city government takes advantage of the confusion and uncertainty that residents experience as they wait to be evicted. As this account demonstrates, state representatives often offer inaccurate information and temporary solutions that only create more confusion and desperation as residents struggle to find something or someone who can and will address their plight. By blaming CIBA, the district attorney only contributed to the instability and precarious conditions of the residents, jeopardizing the relationship between the residents and CIBA.

Although CIBA is successful in granting more time to residents so that they can remain inside *casas tomadas,* rarely are residents able to benefit or to organize, simply because future options and expectations remain stark and illusive. In his study on squatters in Thailand, Harms (2013) explains "waiting makes it difficult to "use" time in ways that might contribute to the normal productive activity associated with economic as well as social life…The poor are made to wait. And waiting keeps people poor" (356). Similarly, residents of *casas tomadas*' lack of spatial and temporal control over present conditions and future prospects creates a precarious situation that reinforces their own conditions of poverty and instability (Desmond, 2012; Harms, 2013). This is also the case once residents move out from their *casa tomada.* If they are able to remain in the city, oftentimes they continue to live in a building or a situation that only serves to reinforce their poverty and instability in Buenos Aires.

When the school year ended, around mid-December, all of the residents moved out. Two of the families went to live in CIBA's headquarters in *Anchorena*. Adela and her family moved outside of the city close to where her husband worked as a tailor in a workshop. CIBA was able to negotiate with the city government so that the residents immediately received the full amount of the subsidy instead of in monthly installments. When I returned in August 2012 the building remained as it had been when I had left three years earlier, except this time, like in *Tucuman*, there was a large bolt on the door.

CHAPTER IX

Ni Gente Sin Casa, Ni Casas Sin Gente

"Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build"

Martin Heidegger in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*

INTRODUCTION

Situated in the context of global and neoliberal transformations that are increasingly displacing the poor from city centers, my dissertation explores the strategies and livelihood practices the urban poor employ to negotiate access to housing and resources inside the city. My findings suggest that squatters' strategies and livelihood practices vary at different stages of the eviction process and are contingent upon the socio-political and spatial-temporal conditions that exist at the household, organizational and city-state scales.

Using an institutional ethnography approach, grounded in intensive participant observation and informal and semi-structured interviews, my findings demonstrate that tenuous living conditions have a destabilizing impact on urban residents at multiple scales. I show how residents of *casas tomadas* experience chronic instability through everyday strategies and interactions they employ to control and maneuver through uncertain temporalities, crowded spatialities and conflicting social conditions. This research highlights the complex and dynamic set of practices, structures and interactions, which are tightly bound to residents' daily realities and future prospects. It identifies how poor urban residents employ different strategies with respect to their temporal and spatial vulnerabilities in meaningful and often contradictory ways.

Through this research I argue for the importance of micro-scale approaches that focus on the multiple meanings and uses of house and home for poor urban households and communities struggling to remain in the city. That said, an understanding of home and its multiple meanings is not limited to the micro-scale in this research. Instead, my findings demonstrate the central importance of housing and home as a material and meaningful resource from which residents can access the city and its resources in multiple ways and at different scales.

The following research questions framed this study's main themes and organized the information used to explore residents' housing situation spatially, temporally, relationally and structurally at various scales. Specifically, I asked: (1) what place-making practices and strategies do residents of *casas tomadas* develop in order to secure a space for themselves and their families inside *casas tomadas*?; (2) How do residents of *casas tomadas* build and maintain alliances that potentially ensure their access to livelihood resources in the city?; (3) How do the socio-political and temporal-spatial conditions at the household, institutional and city level shape these strategies and/or livelihood practices of the different actors involved in this process?; (4) What are some of the different urban resources and practices (alluded to in the first three questions)?; and how do residents use and give meaning to these resources in their daily lives?

Using a multi-scale approach to home and the right to the city, my research contributes to the larger issues of the social and political dimensions of urban development in the Americas. I achieved this through an empirical analysis of the routine experiences, relationships and daily strategies of poor urban immigrants in Buenos Aires

as they engage in place and home-making practices for themselves and their family inside the city. Furthermore, I highlighted the multiple and overlapping *lived* meanings of home as representative of how residents and communities cope in highly unstable housing conditions inside the city.

The geographical proximity to jobs and other resources such as education, services and even public transportation mean that cities can offer important benefits not available in other communities or landscapes (Gallagher, 2010). As such, through this research, I argue that cities should be imagined, planned and developed to address the needs of all its inhabitants; cities in which multiple, diverse communities are able to both benefit from and contribute to these spaces (Lefebvre, 1999; Purcell, 2002; Guano, 2004; Fenster, 2005; Brenner et al., 2011).

Currently, urban development is happening through global investments and economic interests that are transforming the city and creating increasing demand for goods and services and other amenities (Sassen, 2001). This financial investment could potentially promote more inclusive and culturally and economically diverse communities in which all urban dwellers benefit from increased investment and interest. Instead, poor residents are being pushed out of the city to make way for the more affluent and their economic interests and ways of life. Yet the demand for low-wage jobs and services remains. With it are the families and individuals who struggle to stay in the city despite the social and economic forces destabilizing their routine livelihood prospects. Given this perplexing reality, this research originally developed out of the broader conceptual and moral query regarding why so few are granted the right to the city and why so little is

being done to remedy urban trends of displacement and forced mobility of the lower classes.

SYNTHESIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

My research underscores how strategies, relationships and interactions are determined by temporal and spatial conditions in the daily lives of residents of *casas tomadas* at different scales. The strategies and practices that residents of *casas tomadas* employ inside *casas tomadas* to claim access to spaces and resources are often based on spontaneous and strategic interactions and relationships, bodies, personal objects, and even sounds. Residents constantly manipulate the spaces around them to attempt to create some kind of stable home-place for themselves and family members. They mark territory by using sheets, kettles and other objects to control spaces and wait times. As such, residents interact with others and employ things that allow them a certain degree of control over shared and private spaces. At the same time, the effects of constantly negotiating uncertainty are exhausting and destabilizing. Residents often exist in the present because of the immediacy and uncertainty of securing basic needs and the inability to anticipate the future. This temporal and spatial uncertainty means that everyday tasks and long-term struggles can consume residents and create a high degree of anxiety.

Many of these daily activities revolve around women and their efforts to create a home-place for themselves and their families. The women living in *casas tomadas* assume most, if not all, responsibilities concerning housing and the struggle for the right to the city. Women are the face of this struggle due to their greater participation in social

organizations and as direct advocates in their interactions with city government. It is women and children who make up the majority of members at weekly meetings and at protests and marches. It is often women who go from hotel to hotel looking for a place to live and who are denied in their roles as mothers when they explain they have a small child. Additionally it is also women who are the main recipients of the housing subsidy, usually in their role as mothers. Women also embody the political struggle for housing when marching down Buenos Aires' large *avenidas*, dragging children by the hand and demanding their right to housing.

My research also explores the relationships that residents develop with CIBA and the city government through its housing subsidy program (AFSC). My findings highlight how residents' relationships with CIBA are complex and contradictory. Similar to the relationships they form inside *casas tomadas,* residents' interactions with CIBA are often marked by negotiation, mistrust, hope and frustration. Residents develop relationships of dependence with CIBA, attending meetings, participating in protests and marches and agreeing to any and all initiatives the organization suggests. In return, residents hope or perhaps expect that CIBA will be able to solve their housing problem for them.

Likewise, CIBA unwittingly develops relationships with its resident-members that often reinforce the uneven power dynamic between the organization and the residents. Thus, although CIBA boasts an egalitarian organizational structure, partly through its ideological objectives and also its reliance dependence on resident members to achieve some of its more lofty political and social objectives, residents still feel dependent on CIBA to resolve their immediate and practical needs. My findings highlight how many

of the residents participate in CIBA's movement, not because they are ideologically committed, but because they believe that if they do what CIBA wants, they will and should be rewarded. When eviction draws near and residents are forced to acknowledge the inevitable future, there is a sense of frustration and disillusionment, as if CIBA has let them down, despite all of their efforts. As the day of eviction arrives, residents focus their frustration, anxiety and anger toward CIBA, whom they perceive as having misled them. When residents reach a level of heightened anxiety and insecurity as the day of eviction becomes increasingly more certain, relationships begin to break down.

The city government's housing subsidy (AFSC) is another destabilizing force in residents' struggle for housing and their right to remain in the city. Although it offers some funding to poor families to help them pay for rent once they are evicted, it also adversely impacts poor residents waiting to be evicted from their homes. This happens for a number of reasons, not all of which are related. For example, the subsidy becomes part of residents' and CIBA's strategies to negotiate with the city government the terms of the eviction. Although this can be positive, the subsidy can lead to further tensions and mistrust. In other words, the subsidy, while used as a strategy in favor of the residents, often creates further stress and turmoil. Finally, the nature of the subsidy is focused on the family as an individual unit, therefore giving little incentive for families to collectively organize with others in their houses.

Perhaps one of the most frustrating findings of this study has been the obvious and also ironic way in which socio-political structures inside Buenos Aires create or reinforce temporal and spatial instability for the poor throughout the city. The housing

policies in place and their implementation highlight a situation of ambivalence and intentional confusion and inefficiency (Auyero, 2012). Residents' experience of waiting for eviction was one of extreme frustration and anxiety. As I discuss in Chapter VIII, residents attempt to find or create solutions to their housing problem knowing they have few if any real options. Furthermore, the level of bureaucracy, inaccurate information and paternalistic attitudes toward residents exacerbate their confusion, anxiety and dependence on state structures and also on CIBA. Practices of misinforming and making residents wait weeks and months to receive information on their cases only further reinforce the conditions of vulnerability to which residents are subjected.

My research shows how the poor know that they must perform in order to gain access to resources that they need or even to which they have a right (Auyero, 2012; Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Residents' perceived and real subordination positions them in a situation of dependence in which they strategically incorporate themselves into uneven partnerships with those who they perceive as having power, in order to access certain resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). The hierarchical nature of many of the institutional and structural relationships reinforces conditions of dependence that impact people's ability to organize or make demands.

As I demonstrate throughout my research, this urban instability is experienced through routine temporalities and spatialities that further subordinate and destabilize residents at different scales and spaces. At the same time, residents—women in particular—continually engage in practices to limit and control these temporal and spatial conditions and to secure resources and make a place for themselves inside the city.

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

This research offers important contributions to further studies on the effects of neoliberal trends on marginalized communities in urban centers. I position this research within the tensions of a right to the city approach and the empirical reality on the ground for so many urban dwellers. Specifically, as part of a right to the city and critical urban studies project, my point of departure has been to understand how poor urban residents who are denied the right to the city, struggle to access urban resources and make a place for themselves and their families.

Through a multi-scale approach that prioritizes the material and symbolic significance of the house and home, I have argued that the home, when understood as a resource, offers an important space from which we can begin a broader discussion on the right to the city. Drawing on the work of institutional and urban ethnographers (Katz, 2010; Smith, 1989) I contend that this approach aids in presenting a more complete view of the different spatial and temporal ways the city is lived and experienced at multiple sites and with respect to routine practices, strategies and conditions.

Access theory is also an important approach in the way that it challenges and complements the more normative and conceptual notions of the right to the city. As Marcuse (2010) explains, the right to the city as we imagine it is a future goal, something to work toward or to imagine. Unlike the right to the city, access theory offers a framework to examine the empirical reality of urban life and the effects on those communities who have no or little right to the city. Access theory is essentially about those who do not have rights, in the same way that the right to the city is also concerned

with this same population (Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Marcuse, 2010). Yet, both frame their concern in somewhat oppositional ways. I found this tension useful for this research specifically because it both highlights the dynamic nature of access to things, the tremendous resourcefulness and agency of residents to access those things, as well as the sheer importance of the struggle for a real right to the city project (Harvey, 2003).

This dissertation makes contributions to the literature in Critical Urban and Feminist Studies, The Right to the City and Political Ecology, with its focus on routine relationships of power and emphasis on resources. Drawing on these theoretical frameworks this research explores the spatial and temporal effects of urban instability at three overlapping and interconnected sociospatial spheres: the *home*, through a study of how residents cope, living in crowded, run down and temporary spaces; the *city-scape*, through their relationships with CIBA and their struggle to access urban resources and stay in the city; and *state structures*, through an exploration of poor urban dwellers' positionality in relation to state programs and socio-political structures. Through this multi-scale analysis of urban experiences of place-making and the struggle to use and remain in the city, this work contributes to these literatures by providing further insight into how the city is experienced, the material and symbolic significance of home, the spatial interconnections of the right to the city and finally, the way in which spatialities and temporalities impact how residents experience the city.

Home-Spaces, Home-Making

This research contributes to the right to the city literature by arguing that a discussion on the right to the city should begin at the home. In this context, this research

offers a more prominent home-scale analysis that envisions house and home as intricately connected to and defined by multiple spaces throughout the cityscape. Drawing on access theory, the analysis enriches critical approaches of home in the way that it conceptualizes home as an urban resource; one that potentially offers the ability for residents to further access other important and fundamental urban resources. Like Lefebvre's (1999) notion of the right to the city in terms of the active ways that inhabitants are able to *use* and *contribute* to the city, I center my analysis on the home as an initial space in which these practices begin and from where they can then be reproduced at different scales and spaces. As such, the findings offer a unique understanding of home in terms of its functional significance within a much broader urban context.

I show how residents of squatter homes strategically act and engage in place-making activities that allow them to create home-spaces that can offer some sense of stability. The focus on home through activities, relationships and dynamics that occur both inside and outside the houses is not entirely novel (Platt, 1996; Massey, 1994; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). However, my employment of this approach to understand how residents engage with these spaces, make a space for themselves and to access the city amidst great instability contributes to a more complex and broader analysis of the social and spatial meanings and uses of home, particularly by poor and marginalized communities.

This analysis of home as a resource differs significantly from other critical or feminist perspectives of home, which often remain at the micro-scale or focus on the

more symbolic, personal or social meanings of home (Mallet, 2004; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Although the division of home as a private space versus the 'outside' public world has been challenged by feminists like Doreen Massey (1994), home generally continues to be studied and imagined within its spatial confines (Mallet, 2004). In this research the home is envisioned in the way that urban residents are able to benefit from the city and its resources.

Along this same vein, this research shows how gender plays an important role in the way that the right to the city and urban experiences of place-making and access are experienced. The connection between gender and home has been widely studied (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). However, a focus on gender and on migrants, in terms of how the city is experienced and lived, has often been downplayed or ignored in much of the mainstream literature in urban studies, and certainly with respect to the right to the city (Fenster, 2005). In this research, an emphasis on home and a focus on the everyday life of women as they struggle to remain inside Buenos Aires frame how the struggle for the right to the city is experienced and embodied. This gendered and multi-scale approach highlights how one's identity, positionality and social conditions constitute if and how he/she is able to access resources and make claims on the city. In other words, the gendered experience of the city is one that is embodied and lived at multiple scales in different ways.

The Cityscape: CIBA

This research also contributes to the literature on urban processes by exploring how tenuous living conditions lead to the development of particular spaces and

relationships that are structured around the temporal and spatial conditions in which they live. This approach focuses on the way in which residents experience eviction at different stages of this prolonged process. The spatial and temporal awareness residents have of their situation is present in the routine, everyday practices and experiences of negotiating shared spaces and resources, and the longer term experience of waiting for eviction. I argue that the routine effects of these spatial and temporal processes are experienced and lived not only inside *casas tomadas,* but also at different scales and locations throughout the city, highlighting the multi-scale character of urban vulnerability.

Through this analysis, my research illustrates how temporal-spatial, cultural and state structures both enable and constrain individual and collective action. By employing Ribot and Peluso's (2003) access theory, the analysis highlights how residents engage in practical affiliations in order to secure basic needs and maintain access to other resources. I demonstrate how although residents and CIBA form alliances to struggle for the right to housing and the right to remain in the city, their motivations and objectives are quite different. On the one hand, CIBA's goals are part of a broader, ideological struggle for the right to the city and a radical transformation in the city's social structures. They argue for the right to housing as a human right and rally around the slogan, *Ni gente sin casa, ni casas sin gente.*[64] Through these and other practices and strategies, CIBA's struggle is one that challenges capitalist notions of private property by pushing for the housing needs of poor urban residents as a stated priority and human right.

[64]Translation: No people without houses, no houses without people.

By focusing less on the ideological framework of the organization and more on the routine practices and internal dynamics of CIBA and residents' affiliations and relationships, this dissertation explores the internal dynamic of organizations and considers the difficulty of organizing around a right to the city movement. Through this examination, I argue that the temporal urgency of securing immediate needs and demands reinforce the poor's inability to collectively organize around long-term radical change. Instead, my findings suggest how residents' organizational affiliations are part of more practical and immediate sets of goals.

The State: Waiting for the Subsidy

Finally, this research contributes to studies that focus on temporal meanings and structures and uneven relationships of power and subordination, through an exploration of how eviction and other structural conditions impact residents' strategies and relationships. In my examination of participants' experiences of waiting for eviction and their subsidies, I uncover the tensions created by uncertain circumstances and the manner in which residents enact strategies to cope with this instability. I highlight how temporal uncertainty destabilizes resident's normal livelihood practices and future objectives. At the same time, the act of waiting for the housing subsidy is representative of residents of *casas tomada's* attempts at agency and control over their lives. In other words, the act of waiting is clearly a form of agency that should be addressed as such, despite what I show as adverse effects on residents' lives and strategies. By employing this approach to urban experiences, this research contributes to an understanding of the ways in which instability is experienced and affects the different spaces that represent urban dwellers' daily lives.

Finally, my work offers insight into how state institutions position and deal with the poor. Drawing on Auyero's (2012) work, I explore the multiple stages of eviction, with regard to the subsidy, and demonstrate how residents are reeled into subordinate relationships through programs that are supposedly designed to "help" them. Through this analysis this research argues for more critical studies on state sponsored programs that focus on the routine, everyday practices and experiences of the beneficiaries.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on the destabilizing effects of urban development and gentrification on the urban poor is necessary to explore how poor communities are both impacted and cope with these trends. We know that poor communities are being displaced from urban neighborhoods, but little is known about where residents go and how they routinely, spatially and temporally experience gentrification and urban displacement. The lack of research on this area of study is understandable because the nature of the methods used in ethnographic and qualitative studies is generally site-bound. Thus, ethnographic approaches that focus on forced mobility and the medium-to-long-term effects of this, pose a series of challenges with respect to the quality and precision of this kind of data collection (Katz, 2010).

Further research needs to be developed that captures the experience of forced mobility of poor urban dwellers. Questions regarding the emotional effects of gentrification on the poor, the decision making processes of choosing to stay or leave the city, the destinations of poor families, and the effects on quality of life, instability and people's ability to access resources within a new spatial terrain, all merit further research.

Additionally, studies on commuting and public transportation options and routes must be considered as urban residents who move out of the city are suddenly faced with new spatial challenges.

These types of analyses, however, require innovative methods that respond to the challenges of developing research that is spatially and temporally mobile and dynamic and that is able to take into account the locations and patterns of both collective and individual movement. In my own future research I plan to incorporate an analysis of this "second stage" of eviction, following residents to new destinations and analyzing impacts of displacement over time. How forced mobility and displacement from urban centers impact poor residents and communities is the focus of the next phase of my research agenda. First and foremost, I plan to develop a study to include an analysis of the destinations of migrant squatters once they are evicted from Buenos Aires and how their quality of life and access to urban resources has changed. Through my affiliations with CIBA and the relationships I developed while in the field, I have been able to maintain contact with many of the residents of squatter houses who have since been evicted and moved to other houses and areas in and around the city.

Cities around the world continue to grow both in terms of population and area, as does inequality between the urban rich and the urban poor. Inside the United States alone, cities like San Francisco, New York and Miami are becoming increasingly expensive and exclusive. Currently rent prices are now rising out of the reach of middle class urban residents. In Latin America, in cities like Rio de Janeiro, Santiago and Lima, rent hikes and development are evicting the poor, pushing them further and further out of

the city. The long-term changes and impacts on the urban poor and the social, physical and environmental fabric of cities are becoming increasingly obvious. However, further ethnographic and micro-scale work is also necessary to capture how these physical and social changes are affecting societies' most vulnerable communities, with a focus on the home as a primary space from which urban residents are able to build their lives.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Investigación
El propósito de esta investigación es examinar cómo los inquilinos de casas en procesos de desalojo negocian el uso y significado del espacio urbano en Buenos Aires, estudiando específicamente en el tema de la vivienda. El propósito de las entrevistas y conversaciones es entender mejor los distintos problemas, prácticas cotidianas, percepciones, experiencias y opiniones sobre la realidad de ser una persona en situación de emergencia habitacional en Buenos Aires. Le voy a hacer preguntas sobre cómo llegó a Buenos Aires, un día típico en su vida aquí, los lugares que frecuenta, cómo se siente siendo Peruano en Buenos Aires, y sus opiniones sobre vivir en Argentina. Además otras preguntas sobre su edad, número de años en Buenos Aires, número de personas viviendo en su casa, tipo de empleo, etc. Su identidad y toda la información relacionada con ella se mantendrá completamente confidencial o anónima. Con su permiso, las entrevistas serán grabadas con una grabadora digital. Toda la información se guardará en un lugar seguro. Usted puede terminar la entrevista o no contestar una pregunta específica en cualquier momento. Muchas gracias por participar.

Preguntas generales:

Hace cuánto tiempo que vive en Buenos Aires?

Por qué vino?

Piensa quedarse mucho tiempo?

En qué / dónde trabaja aquí?

En qué trabajaba en Perú/tu lugar de orígen?

Con cuántos miembros de su familia vive en Buenos Aires?

Cuántas personas trabajan?

Como familia, cuánto ganan al mes (aproximadamente)?

Trabajan en blanco?

Cuál es el nivel educativo más alto que usted completó?

Situación Habitacional:

Cuándo llegó a Buenos Aires, dónde vivió al principio?

En cuántos lugares ha vivido usted desde que llegó a Buenos Aires?

Me puede relatar un poco dónde ha vivido y como llegó a cada lugar?

***(Ahora dónde vive?)

Por qué vive en este lugar?

Está satisfecho con el lugar donde vive ahora?
Por qué sí/no?

En que situación habitacional le gustaría estar?

Tiene algún plan al futuro para poder conseguir lo que quiere en términos de la vivienda?

Buscarías otra opción habitacional?
por ejemplo: alquilar un departamento, hotel, ir a provincia, villas?
Relaciones/Dinámica en la Casa?

Cuántas familias viven en esta casa?

Con cuántas familias comparte el baño?

Con cuántas familias comparte la cocina?

Hay otros espacios que tienen que compartir?
Cuáles son?

Usted se lleva bien con los vecinos en la casa?

Hay momentos o situaciones cuando se organizan en grupo para determinadas actividades: para cocinar, para limpiar, etc?

Hay divisiones entre grupos o personas en la casa?

A pesar de las divisiones los grupos se llevan bien?

Qué tipo de tensiones hay?

¿Hay lugares dentro de la casa donde se siente sumamente/extremadamente/especialmente) cómodo/incómodo?

Cuáles son los espacios que más usa en la casa?

Cuáles son las distinciones entre espacios públicos (espacios compartidos) y espacios privados?
****

Hay espacios a los que solo algunas personas/grupos, y no otros, pueden acceder?

Qué servicios comparten en la casa?
(como gas, luz, agua.. etc..)

Como consiguieron estos servicios?

Quien se encarga de asegurar que estos servicios se pagan?

Cuánto pagan al mes por todos los servicios? Todos pagan?

Relación con Buenos Aires:

Cuántas horas viajas al día en la ciudad?

A dónde vas en la ciudad, durante un día típico?

Usted se identifica con el barrio en donde vive?
Por qué sí/no?

Cuáles son los lugares que frecuenta en su barrio?
(ejemplo.. tiendas, centros culturales, escuelas, parques, restaurantes, roperos, merenderos, organizaciones, una calle, etc.)

Cuáles son los servicios en el barrio que utiliza en forma mas/menos regular?
(ejemplo: escuelas, subsidios, salud, etc….)

Cuáles son los servicios estatales que usted y su familia utilizan/reciben?

En su tiempo libre cuáles son los lugares de la ciudad que visita?

Hay partes de la ciudad donde se siente cómodo/incomodo? Por qué?

Qué es lo que más le gusta de la ciudad?

Qué es lo que menos le gusta de la ciudad?

Usted se siente parte de la ciudad? Del barrio? o de algún espacio particular en la ciudad?

Ser inmigrante

Cuál es el principal problema/preocupación de ser inmigrante en Buenos Aires?

Usted tiene el DNI Argentino?

Si no, ha empezado los tramites para tener el DNI?

Qué documento tiene en este momento?

Usted ha sufrido discriminación por ser migrante?

Dónde? Qué pasó?

Influye el hecho de ser (Peruano) dentro de la casa donde usted vive?
En qué sentido?

Crees que influye su identidad en las posibilidades de acceder otras posibilidades de vivienda?

Preguntas sobre el futuro

Cómo se siente ahora que sabe que tiene poco tiempo para buscar otra situación habitacional?

Ha cambiado la dinámica con sus vecinos? (ahora que saben que tiene que irse de la casa)
En qué sentido? (por ejemplo: se llevan mejor, peor o igual?)

Cómo se está preparando para dejar la casa?

Ya ha empezado a buscar dónde vivir?
(Cuándo va a empezar a buscar?)

Dónde está buscando?

Cómo está buscando?

Si tienen la opción de ir a otra casa/hotel dónde no hay que pagar alquiler, iría?

Si encuentras donde vivir en las afueras de Buenos Aires, iría?

Cuál sería la mejor solución, en términos de encontrar una vivienda?

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Encuesta sobre el desalojo/subsidio
El propósito de esta encuesta es coleccionar información sobre como se vive el desalojo y la importancia del subsidio. No queremos molestan ni fastidiar una situación ya muy difícil pero esperamos que con esta información podemos contribuir a eventualmente terminar con las políticas injustas de los desalojos. Agradecemos tu participación y queremos que sepas que tienes toda la libertad de no contestar una pregunta o de terminar la encuesta en cualquier momento.

1. Ahora que viene el desalojo, han buscado otra alternativa habitacional?

   Sí No

2. Cuáles recursos/medios han utilizado para encontrar una alternativa habitacional?

   Diario Inmobiliaria
   Hoteles Amigos
   Jefe Jefa
   Caminando Buscar en provincia
   Otro… por favor explicar: Familia

3. Han encontrado una alternativa habitacional dónde pueden ir?

   Sí No

   * Dónde?

   * Qué tipo de vivienda es?

4. Si han encontrado algo, por qué siguen viviendo en el hotel?

5. Cuáles son los problemas que vos has enfrentado que han causado dificultades o la imposibilidad de encontrar algo?

   Por ejemplo: Ninguno Edad de los hijos Los precios

   Garantía Distancia Tiempo

Discriminación (explicar) Otro (explicar)

6. Qué saben del Programa de Atención a Familias en Situación de Calle y el subsidio?

   Nada Poco Algo Mucho

- Puedes explicar un poco lo que sabes del programa/subsidio en relación a tu situación particular?

7. Cómo te sientes con respecto al futuro en términos de la vivienda?

Con confianza	tranquilidad	angustia
Preocupación	ira (contra quien?)	culpa

8. Cuánto influye el subsidio en tus decisiones de quedarte en el hotel y en buscar otra alternativa de vivienda?

   Nada Poco Algo Mucho

9. Cómo piensan usar el subsidio?

10. Para vos, que sería una situación habitacional satisfactoria?

11. Creen que el subsidio puede contribuir a una situación habitacional satisfactoria? Cómo?

12. Has estado en una situación de desalojo en el pasado?

    Qué pasó?

    Dónde se mudaron?

    Recibieron el subsidio?

13. Información demográfica:

    Nombre

    Teléfono:

    Tamaño de la familia:

    Edad de los miembros:

    Laburo que realizas:

    Sueldo mensual:

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